

# Letters on Poetry

from

W. B. Yeats

to

Dorothy Wellesley

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## FOREWORD

THESE letters, making a continuous correspondence on the subject of poetry, are published with the full consent and approval of Mrs. Yeats. Not only do they contain many of Yeats's views on the technique of verse, but they also reflect the fresh informal workings of his mind on a variety of subjects. Here may be seen, month by month, often week by week, the spontaneous flow of his extraordinary intellectual vitality during the last four years of his life; those years when he showed not only that his creative power was as vigorous as ever, but also that he was still reaching forward into new forms of expression.

It is for this reason, and because of the great impression his later work has made upon the new generation of writers, that this correspondence has been thought to have sufficient interest to justify its publication. It lifts a curtain on the creative processes of a great poet. I have inserted in two places notes of conversations and observations recorded at the time, and have added a short account of his last days. Passages from a certain number of my own letters have been included when this seemed the simplest way to explain the allusions in his. They may help to emphasize the personal character of this book, which seeks to preserve the freshness of a living personality.

Yeats's characteristic spelling has been preserved throughout his letters.

*Penns in the Rocks,*  
1939.

DOROTHY WELLESLEY.

## NOTE

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In the footnotes to pages 91, 93, 103, and 159 the title should be *Last Poems and Plays*, 1940.



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## LETTERS

IN the spring of 1935 W. B. Yeats was engaged in a wide reading of contemporary poetry for the purpose of making his anthology of Modern Verse for the Oxford University Press. During his reading he came one day across a poem of mine called 'Horses'. It happened that, on that same day, he was visited by Lady Ottoline Morrell and he asked her if she happened to know the author. She replied that she knew me slightly, that I lived in the country and seldom came to London, and she offered to bring him down to Penns in the Rocks. This explains the opening letter, which followed an explanatory letter from Lady Ottoline.

D. W.

London,

May 30 [1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,<sup>1</sup>

Will you be in Sussex in (say) the first week in July. If so I would like to postpone my visit until then. I want to get back to Dublin in a few days, and conserve my vitality for the journey. If you will not be in Sussex in July I will go down on the nearest day that suits Lady Ottoline after Saturday next.

I was reading your poetry last [night], parts of the poems about horses and flowers and the whole of that about fishes to Sean O'Casey. I gave your poems as an example of nobility of style—the noblest style I have met of late years.

I thank you for your invitation.

Yours,

W. B. Yeats.

<sup>1</sup> W. B. Y. was well aware that this was not correct. But he disliked the name Gerald, particularly 'Lady Gerald', and usually preferred to call me 'Lady Dorothy' until it became 'Dorothy'.—D. W.

*Letters*

(*Telegram.*)

[30 May, 1935.]

Lady Dorothy Wellesley Withyham Sussex.

Can Ottoline and I come down Monday for night.

Yeats 17 Lancaster Gate Terrace London.

17 Lancaster Gate Terrace,  
W.2.

Thursday.

[May 30, 1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I wired this evening that I had changed my plans and that Lady Ottoline would motor me down on Monday. She has phoned to say that her husband would drive but return to town on Monday evening and that she would stay the night. But I have no doubt you have heard from her.

You have been very kind to ask me and I hope you will forgive my vacillating mind but it did not seem possible when I wrote.

I was quoting you to T. S. Elliot last night.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

17 Lancaster Gate Terrace,  
Wednesday.

[June 5, 1935.]

Dear Lady Gerald Wellesley,

I thank you for a delightful and exciting evening and morning—may I not use the biblical phrase ‘the evening and morning were the first day’ or what ever the phrase is. At any rate I will write to you from Ireland, where I go in a couple of days, about certain of your poems.

Yours sincerely,

W. B. Yeats.

PS. I left beside my bed a novel called *Rustless Roost*. It was brought to me by a friend, who spends his days compiling a French Dictionary and seems to give up his

leisure to reading about cowboys. It would be very kind of you to send the book to him. . . .

He has a large cowboy library and this book may be a treasured classic.

Penns in the Rocks,  
June 11th, 1935.

Dear Mr. Yeats,

I have delayed writing because each time I have put pen to paper the letter has increased itself into a half-finished essay on poetry.

I have been writing ever since you were here, but the impetus is so great that I haven't a notion if it is good or bad. But it is exhausting and that's generally a good sign.

Yours ever,

Dorothy Wellesley.

PS. Last night I dreamt I was riding a camel in Jerusalem. I dreamt that I came, highly laden, to the gate that is called the Eye of the Needle. My friends had assembled there to meet me, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, and the rest. My camel knelt down unbidden, and I said: "Unload us, my friends, so that we may pass under the gate." For I knew that that was what they wanted. They came forward eagerly to deliver me of my burden, which consisted of paper money, all of which was worthless. I remounted my camel and went out through the gate, seeking to find the ruins of a column called the Pillar of St. Simon Stylites.

Riversdale,  
Willbrook,  
Rathfarnham, Dublin,  
June 14.

Dear Lady Gerald,

Since I got back here last Sunday I have spent my time between proof sheets and your poems.<sup>1</sup> To-day I have

<sup>1</sup> *Poems of Ten Years 1924-1934.*

## Letters

read—not for the first time—your lovely enigmatic poem ‘The Old Mill’. One word puzzles me. Your three cats scale sacks and rafters to ‘the rafters blind’. Why ‘blind’? The poem makes me remember that in China and Indo-China the houses—or so a certain traveller tells me—have no parks but rise out of the wild rocks and trees because ‘Nature must be as little disturbed as possible’. Your work resembles and contrasts with that of Edith Sitwell. She too loves minute exquisite detail but her world is literary, artificial, almost that of Russian Ballet, whereas you play with the real world as a child, as a young girl, as a young man plays, you are full of poet’s learning but it is the learning the unlearned desire and understand. . . . I see from one of the poems that you wrote about Madam Tussauds, but you have not reprinted the poem which seems an amusing theme. Where can I find that poem?

The fact that you play with the real world gives your reader a sense of re-discovery of his own youth, or of something that you and he have shared. I am thinking of such poems as ‘The Lost Forest’. If I had your descriptive genius I would have written just such poems of the woods at Coole and of woods known in Sligo when a child.

I may not be in England again as soon as I thought. Ashley Dukes has put off my play until September. Whatever happens I shall however be in England early in August that we may renew our acquaintance. (You spoke of leaving Sussex in September.) By that time I shall be much further with my work for *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. Perhaps I may ask your advice (if you will be so kind as to give it). Yet it is of your own poetry I want to talk—that mysterious rhythm which is as though I myself were talking in a dream, and as I have never talked yet.

We bloom by lions dead  
Of old age in the wild.

But I had better stop, I am writing badly. I can praise a work of criticism, a work of philosophy, with intelligence, but not a poem. When I come to write of poetry I seem—I suppose because it is all instinct with me—completely ignorant. I wrote once ‘I would be ignorant as the dawn’ but now I want to explain and cannot.

I am correcting proof sheets, reading poetry and recovering from my four months’ illness.

Yrs sincerely,  
W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
June 17.

Dear Lady Gerald,

May I come to you then in the second part of August and for a few days, long enough to see your woods. By that time I shall be well enough to walk there. I shall not be a burden to you, for the trees will entertain me. The doctor has just been, and ordered me three inactive months for recovery, my exercise apparently restricted to my garden, but I know I shall be myself in two. In two months I can walk a wood again.<sup>1</sup>

I have found ‘Madam Tussaud’s’ disguised from me by the distrusted neighbourhood of the ‘Extemporary Effusion’.<sup>2</sup> I was wrong in not liking your poems in regular stanzas. ‘Great Grandmama’ and ‘Sheep’ are delightful things—I have just read them to my daughter (aged 16); she prefers ‘Sheep’ to ‘Great Grandmama’. I think I shall want both, but then I shall want so much in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*. For the moment I am studying you, Edith Sitwell, Sacheverel Sitwell and Sackville West together. You alone write out [of] innocent, natural happiness—how much pain must have gone to make the happiness sharp and lucid. I am to write an

<sup>1</sup> Jan. 1939. He has not yet walked a wood again.—D. W.

<sup>2</sup> This refers to *Poems of Ten Years* (Macmillan).—D. W.

## Letters

introduction to my Anthology so I shall be able to say this or something like it. The two Sitwells have their own great qualities.

I wish you had sent me those letters with your essay upon poetry.<sup>1</sup>

My present preferences are

The Asian Desert

Horses

The Deserted House

The Lost Forest

The Forest in October

Fishing

Great Grand Mama

Sheep

Matrix.

But I may change.

If I may go to you for a few days in August I will arrange to go on to Masfield who comes here for public dinner on June 27th.

Yrs ever,

W. B. Yeats.

. . . A ferment has come upon my imagination. If I write more poetry it will be unlike anything I have done.

Penns in the Rocks,  
June 21st, 1935.

Dear Mr. Yeats,

I thank you for two charming letters. I should have answered sooner, but have been torn all ways by things called duties—all absurdity. Also I have started writing poetry again, half the day and night. This happened the day after I heard from Ottoline. I do not think this was coincidence, but cause and effect. I feel more justified now in my patchwork of a life. I was very glad when you

<sup>1</sup> This letter was never sent so, it is not included in this correspondence.—  
D. W.



said you had been sorry to hear my name. I know that you realised instantly how difficult and exhausting it all is. Hardly shall the rich man enter into the temple of the muses. I have tried to keep faith since a child, and now I am happier and shall probably make my peace with the Pharisees of all sorts. Is this right or wrong?

In your first letter you ask about the poem 'Old Mill', saying 'Why rafters blind?' I used this as blind alley, without windows. I should have written of the roof perhaps, not rafters.

I want to discuss your Anthology. Am so glad that you appreciate Edith and Sacheverell Sitwell. I have always placed them high. . . . This house is yours to work in, at peace, at any time all yours. . . .

I work and think so much by instinct rather than by reason that I am unable to define poetry but only to recognize it. You say you are the same. Perhaps most creative people are so. Their 'remains' are for the critics:

Vultures infernal

Tearing internal

Poets eternal

and so on and so on.

My daughter (sixteen) longs to know your daughter (sixteen). Could she come too?

Yours,

Dorothy Wellesley.

PS. I hear that the King's Gold Medal for poetry has been given to Laurence Whistler. Why?

Riversdale,  
July 6/35.

Dear Lady Gerald,

Do you know the work of Elinor Wylie? Since I found your work I have had as sole excitement here 'Eagle and Mole', a lovely heroic song. My wife tells me that Elinor Wylie had a tragic love affair; where she learnt the fact

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I do not know. I have written for all her work but I doubt if there will be anything else as good. I think that the true poetic movement of our time is towards some heroic discipline. People much occupied with morality always lose heroic ecstasy. Those who have it most often are those Dowson has described (I cannot find the poem but the lines run like this or something like this)

Wine and women and song  
To us they belong  
To us the bitter and gay.

'Bitter and gay', that is the heroic mood. When there is despair, public or private, when settled order seems lost, people look for strength within or without. Auden, Spender, all that seem the new movement *look* for strength in Marxian socialism, or in Major Douglas; they want marching feet. The lasting expression of our time is not this obvious choice but in a sense of something steel-like and cold within the will, something passionate and cold. I went from Elinor Wylie to ——— and except one rather clumsy poem with a fine last line, found her all what my wife calls 'hot lobster'.

In the last few days I have re-read all Edith Sitwell and found her very hard to select from, poem is so dependant upon poem. It is like cutting a piece out of a tapestry. If you have strong preferences among her poems please tell me. I have made my choice but feel very uncertain. I take back what I said of your friend Sackville West, having found 'The Greater Cats', that has the irrational element rhetoric never has. It is very moving.

I notice that you have much lapis lazuli; someone has sent me a present of a great piece carved by some Chinese sculptor into the semblance of a mountain with temple, trees, paths and an ascetic and pupil about to climb the

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mountain. Ascetic, pupil, hard stone, eternal theme of the sensual east. The heroic cry in the midst of despair. But no, I am wrong, the east has its solutions always and therefore knows nothing of tragedy. It is we, not the east, that must raise the heroic cry.

I am a poor letter writer because I have so many letters to write—this is the 16th letter to-day and the only one it was a pleasure to write.

Yours ever,  
W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
[8th July, 1935.]

Dear Lady Gerald. . . .

May I bring my daughter with me to Penns in the Rocks on August 14 or thereabout? I go on to Masfield and she to the Shakespeare festival at Stratford on Avon. She has two passions, painting and the stage—she has made a modern stage with electric light etc. At six or seven she was an artistic prodigy but is now just an ordinary talented art student. I shall know nothing of her in another three years. Tick-tick—one hears the infernal machine ticking. How long may we stay? Would a week be too long? Please say if it would. I expect to be in England about three weeks.

In October I go to Mallorca. My various doctors advise a winter in a warm climate. I had thought of going to India but that fell through so I told my Indian monk, Purohit Swami, that we would go to some warm place for two months and that while there I would put his translation of the *Upanishads* into good English. My doctors have spread those two months into four. I had meant to write poetry all the rest of the time but I doubt if my *Oxford Book of Modern Poetry* will let me. I have a longing to escape into a new theme—I am tired of my little personal

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poetry, your 'Matrix' has given me a glimpse of what I want.

I know I must be spelling abominably—my daughter has beaten me in two games of croquet<sup>1</sup>—I am tired correcting proof sheets.

I will write a better letter if I can and without waiting for your reply to this.

Yrs ever,  
W. B. Yeats.

Penns in the Rocks,  
July 10th, 1935.

Dear Mr. Yeats,

I have your last two letters beside me, and hasten first to say that Elizabeth and I will be delighted to see you here on August 14th for a week. I hope Mrs. Yeats will come too? Please tell her that I shall be sincerely disappointed if she cannot come.

Now as to poetry. I agree with you about Elinor Wylie in general. 'Eagle and Mole' is fine. What about 'Hymn to Earth'? Except for an occasional lapse such as:

A little sca-water to make his tears<sup>2</sup>

this poem seems to me both original and traditional, a rare mixture. But I must confess that on receiving your letter this morning I went straight to my Anthologies and read this poem 'Hymn to Earth' for the first time, and I never trust a first or even a second reading. When attempting to judge a poem I read it at three different times of day and in different moods—the melancholy, the heroic, the gay, the craven, the sluggish, the well-fed, the under-fed,

<sup>1</sup> W. B.'s spelling.—D. W.

<sup>2</sup> What about Crashaw?

Two walking baths, two weeping motions,  
Portable and compendious oceans.

Perhaps the worst lines in the English language, with the possible exception of

Untouched by sex the pregnant oyster swells.—D. W.

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the bitter. What a job you've set yourself! When is the book<sup>a</sup> coming out? As to Edith Sitwell, I will study her closely just before you come over. I agree with you (indeed you seem to take the words from my mouth) that she is hard to select from. Her poetry (most of it anyway) is as you say like a tapestry, but a new one patched upon the old, and one feels reluctant to use the scissors. I am very glad that you like V. Sackville West's 'Greater Cats'. It has depth combined with a noble style. This I think is her chief gift. I admire sheer eloquence and a proud style.

All my poetic thinking now turns towards you. 'Have you really a theory?' I ask myself. Should one arrange one's ideas? Virginia Woolf, Herbert Fisher and others have asked me to do this. I try, and break down midway. I've a love for the poetry which perhaps you don't care for: Gray's 'Elegy', the 'Prelude'. My love is catholic. We may disagree in taste? Is 'Dirge without Music' (E. St. Vincent Millay) not 'hot lobster'? as Mrs. Yeats says. An admirable expression anyway. I hope she will come here.

Yours,

Dorothy Wellesley.

PS. My trouble is that if I read modern poetry intently it disturbs my own verse. A few weeks ago I started a new poem about the elements and Man.<sup>1</sup> Now I find this poem of Elinor Wylie, also about the elements.

All this time am torn and distracted by practical and material affairs. My boy, whose youth has rushed to his head, turns to me for everything, moral, practical, spiritual. I get tired. But this sudden and wonderful friendship between you and me gives me strength. 'The spirit keepeth alive.'

<sup>1</sup> This became the poem called 'Fire'.—D. W.

*Letters*

Penns in the Rocks,  
July 20th, 1935.

Dear Mr. Yeats,

Ever since I read of the death of 'A. E.' you have been in my thoughts, and I have been unhappy for your sake. I must write to tell you that I am thinking of you to-night, the night of his funeral, and you filled with memories. Do you, I wonder, ask yourself 'Where is he now?' and how do you answer yourself?

I am absorbed in re-reading your great writers. Synge, the love of my youth, holds and impresses me more than ever. That early death ranks with the tragedy of Marlowe, Emily Brontë, Keats, Shelley.

Strange that a few moments before I read of 'A. E.'s' death I should have marked a phrase from your Autobiography about him as being a picce of perfect literature. I 'starred' this in my book, and five minutes later saw it quoted in *The Times*.

Yours,

Dorothy Wellesley.

PS. I am writing a poem. Very strange. I don't yet understand it altogether.

Riversdale,  
July 26 [1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

My daughter and I—she is talented, gay and timid—will reach you on August 14. My wife cannot come for she will be engaged with my son's birthday and other matters. My daughter will go on to Stratford or to Masefield's but I doubt if I shall. I shall after a few days in London return here. I am still an invalid dreading fatigue, though thank heaven my friends will not notice it for my mind is lively. I am suffering at present from

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A. E.'s funeral. I had to use all my powers of intrigue and self-assertion to prevent a fanatical woman from making it a political demonstration by draping the coffin with the tri-colour. I shall recover my strength after a winter in Majorca out of reach of the telephone. All is well with A. E. His ghost will not walk. He had no passionate human relationships to draw him back. My wife said the other night 'A. E. was the nearest to a saint you or I will ever meet. You are a better poet but no saint. I suppose one has to choose.' When the mail-boat arrived it was met by a small fleet of aeroplanes, rising and dipping in salute—Lady X and her pupils: the devotion of the sinner to the poet even when the poet is a saint. A. E. was my oldest friend—we began our work together. I constantly quarrelled with him but he never bore malice and in his last letter, a month before his death, he said that generally when he differed from me it was that he feared to be absorbed by my personality. He had no passions, but as a young man had to struggle against his senses. He gave up writing poetry for a time because it stirred his senses. He wanted always to be free.

Your praise of the poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay—I have only known her so far in Anthologies and have liked one or two things—has made me order all her books.

I wish you would let me read some of your new poems. As you go on writing and thinking your ideas will arrange themselves. They will arrange themselves as sand strewn upon stretched parchment does—as I have read somewhere—in response to a musical note. To me the supreme aim is an act of faith and reason to make one rejoice in the midst of tragedy. An impossible aim; yet I think it true that nothing can injure us.

Yes, Synge was a supreme writer. His *Deirdre of the Sorrows* is an unfinished sketch, but the last act is supreme

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in pathos and majesty. He had simple and profound passions.

Yrs ever,

W. B. Yeats.

Would you send me one of your new poems or must I wait until I see you?

[Between the 20th and 26th of July I sent him a copy of my poem 'Fire', which follows.—D.W.]

FIRE<sup>1</sup>

AN INCANTATION

*Does not our life consist of the four elements?*  
*Shakespeare.*

The great stone hearth has gone.  
An oblong electric tube is set in the wall  
Like a cheap jewel.  
Men converge no more to the fire,  
Men are one with the isolation;  
The pride of science stands, and the final desolation.

No smoke, no danger, you tell me with veneration;  
Much dies with the fire, young man,  
More than one generation.  
Man has known fire more than one generation.

. . . . .

Modern Man, the mystical  
Core of life, and the carnal  
Are one with that you have slain,  
One with the fire, Cain!  
Truth, Passion, Pain,  
And regeneration eternal.

<sup>1</sup> The revised form of this poem is printed in *Selections from the Poems of Dorothy Wellesley* (Macmillan) and in the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*.



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Life ends where life began :  
Adam delved and Eve span.

Age ago beside the hearth  
Son of man you lay at birth,  
When a cave-man carved a horn;  
By the cave-fire you were born.

. . . . .

The Ionian conceives,  
His fraternity declare  
(Living with Shelley, plants and leaves,  
Their thoughts flowers of the atmosphere)  
Life is Water, Fire, and Air.

Empedocles he added Earth  
To the elements.

Man, the earth shall grow the bread :  
In the dead behold the quick,  
In the quick behold the dead.

Life ends where life began  
At the death or birth.  
'Is it son or daughter, man?'  
'Earth, Air, Fire and Water!'

Thales counted Water,  
Aristotle tells,  
In the elements :  
Thales saw in wells and brine  
Some intelligence divine.

Water then for purge of blood,  
Man's first purge of flesh is so.

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(Put the pan upon the hob,  
Put the tub beside the fire,  
Bathe him so!)  
Belly-ache and sweat of blood  
Whether we will or no.

Anaximenes added Air  
To the elements.

But where is here the envoy  
Of the infinite Air?

(All Man's soul the Air conceives,  
All was Air till God began  
To mould the gladsome god, the Pan  
Who lives among the leaves.)

The Infinite fails you at your birth,  
Sorely fails you, man, on earth.  
He will fail in direst love,  
He'll betray with curse and scorn  
Fame, and Substance, Style, and Place:  
The Infinite fails when you are born.

Fire will never fail you, Man,  
Whether you fever or tire.  
Adam butchered, but Eve span  
For the new life by the fire.

Heraclitus added Fire  
To the elements.

Man, at leaping of the wood-ash  
Shaken with desire  
Take her, slim with silver flanks:  
Heraclitus added Fire.

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Woman, you will muse by wood-ash  
When your young man sleeps beside;  
Mother now of all creation,  
Guardian, you, of re-incarnation,  
Who so lately was a bride.

Woman, by the whitening wood-ash  
Is it girl or son?  
Have you wedded flesh to spirit?  
Carnal in the incarnate  
In this new soul begun?

For the Greek he added  
Half-ethereal Fire.

Butcher, baker, candlestick-maker,  
Blood, and bread, and taper:  
Meat and wheat and light,  
Along with Jones the draper  
The wife finds these in the little shops  
On the right of the undertaker.

Heat the meat then, bake the bread,  
Woman, as you desire.  
Fire's the fellow for board and bed,  
But light the candles at your prayers  
For him you lech with, or will wed:  
Heraclitus added Fire.

Make the fire up, he is cold.  
Dawn is cold in spring.  
Easter comes, but he is old  
At February-fill-dyke when the water  
Is blossoming everything,  
And the wind is wild.

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Here by fireside sits grand-daughter  
Sewing for the coming child.

Empedocles he added Earth  
To the elements.

‘Was it son or daughter, Midwife?’  
In the roof the rents  
Now let years in with the Proctor:  
State Authority or Doctor?  
Death the tall one come at length!  
Entering with men’s memories,  
Entering with the elements,  
With the wind and water,  
With the sorrow and snow;  
Husband, was it son or daughter  
Eighty years ago?

Fire was once his crony;  
Now his flame’s at fag-end,  
Now his fire’s at goal;  
Women, sheet him so!  
Set the tapers spick-and-spanly,  
Candles burn erect and manly  
For that whimpering brat the soul!

Doctor, Undertaker, Death,  
Mother, Gamp and Sire,  
What’s a man at moment’s birth?  
What’s a man at moment’s death?  
‘Earth, Air, Water, Fire!’

Fire was fierce, dead man, in love,  
And in the dread conception.

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Fire was truth through passion known.  
By sweat of blood, by rebel bone,  
Fire, sear the last deception!

Send him forth into the night  
Alone and unattended;  
Send him out alone to Fire,  
His rude dignity of man  
Untended and unfriended.

Run with torches, blaze the pyre,  
Far from town and street,  
Burn his body on the shore  
Where Earth, Air and Water meet  
As all poets know.  
As all dead men know.

Death's the first and everlasting,  
Life the lean time and the fasting,  
Birth the end and everlasting  
Whether we will or no.

D. W.

Riversdale

July 27. [1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

At first I was uncertain because I was thinking with the eye, wondering why certain lines rhymed,<sup>1</sup> why certain others did not. Then I read it out to my wife and I was certain. I found it hard to keep back my tears at so much beauty, my wife's tears glistened in her eyes. It is all speech carried to its highest by intensity of sound and

<sup>1</sup> 'Fire'.

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meaning, all magnificent yet modern and novel. It is perhaps your best work, more profound than anything yet. Now I want the other 'strange' poem that you are writing.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

The repetitions

    'Empedocles he added earth to the elements'

    'Thales counted water . . . in the elements'

and so on are most moving when the poem is read out. All is a masterpiece of oratory.

Riversdale,

August 11. [1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

My daughter and I plan to arrive some time on August 14th. My wife goes into Dublin to-morrow to find out about trains and I will wire you when I know. I have delayed to see the first performance in Dublin of *The Silver Tassie* on Monday night. I shall go to London Tuesday.

I read your poem last night to F. R. Higgins, a man with more poetical genius than his verse has shown as yet. He agrees with my admiration. It has been an excitement reading and selecting modern poets. I have found most excitement in your work, in that of Elinor Wylie, in that of Richard Hughes. Richard Hughes has something of your modernity and intensity of style, but his subject matter like that of Elinor Wylie is not rich. When I get to Penns in the Rocks I would like to go over your last poem, word for word, perhaps to read it out. There may be one or two absurdities in the syntax—I am not sure. You will grow into a great poet.

I began this volume of selections,<sup>1</sup> just as I planned to

<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse.*

## Letters

spend the winter with the Indian monk, Purohit Swami, working on the *Upanishads*, that I might be reborn in imagination. I did [not] foresee that the work would bring me your friendship and for that you have my gratitude.

Yrs ever,

W. B. Yeats.

[In the middle of August Yeats came for a fortnight's visit with his daughter Anne. During these days he first suggested that I should bring out a short volume of *Selections* from my poems. To this he wished to contribute an Introduction.

The fortnight was a busy one, interrupted only by games of croquet with his daughter and mine. We sat, indoors or out, surrounded by the piled volumes of contemporary poets, for I was anxious to persuade him to reconsider some of his selections and omissions for *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, and especially his decision to omit nearly all the war poets, including Wilfred Owen. On this point he remained adamant, holding that 'passive suffering was not a subject for poetry', even as a passive attitude towards nature did not make fine poetry. The creative man must impose himself upon suffering, as he must also upon Nature. I agreed in principle, but I did not agree with his application of this theory to certain poets.

He preferred sitting out of doors, even on windy days. In choosing my 'Selected Poems' his method was to collect all the copies of a volume in the house, and then to cut out crooked bits of pages with a large pair of scissors, throwing these scraps of paper to the ground with an impatient hand for others to pursue and paste together. Some of these had to be collected from the Rocks.—D. W.]

*Letters*

Penns in the Rocks,  
August 29th, 1935.

My dear Mr. Yeats,

There were a few things I had meant to ask about last night, about your book on D. W., and found we had no time. (1) May I have a list of the poems you chose before I go abroad? (2) What is the title to be? (3) May I have a copy of your Preface to the book? I hope this is not giving you extra trouble. Faber and Faber will do this for you if you just give them my address. The last request (copy of Preface) is really a human craving to know what W. B. Yeats is writing about Dorothy Wellesley, so please forgive her!

As a title shall I suggest 'Selections from D. W.'s Poems with a Preface by W. B. Y.?' What do you think? The reason for wanting the list of my poems is to make sure that the last ones we chose, 'Thorn Tree', etc., are included. I feel fairly sure they are. Would it be convenient to arrange the poems as: Descriptive Pieces, and Philosophical Poems, do you think?

You looked so well last night, I hope the report is good? In the meantime I am trying to find other good poems for your Anthology.

Love from  
D. W.

Savile Club,  
69, Brook Street,  
W.1.  
Sunday.

Dear Lady Dorothy,

Yesterday T. S. Elliot lunched with me and I gave him the selection and promised him my introduction tomorrow. On Wednesday he will recommend the book to his Committee. He dined with us at the Ivy Restaurant on Wednesday (7 o'clock). I told him that there was no



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question of your paying for the book. Faber & Faber must take it at their own risk. He said that was quite right. He knows your name but has never read your work. He asked if he was to dress and I said not. I imagine he does not want to go home between his office and dinner.

I thank you for those exciting delightful days. I said to my daughter 'Who did you like best?' She said with fervour 'O Elizabeth', and added, 'Iris thinks the Mona Lisa is a song though she has heard a lecture upon the subject.' She was very happy.

I read 'Fire' (I have my own copy) to Dulac & Helen Beauclerk last night.

Yours always,

W. B. Yeats.

There was a man at Dulac's last night who had your *Matrix* and almost knew its merits.

[*Postscript.*] Forgive this hurried note. I want to get to work on your introduction and a long list of books of poetry I am sending to the Librarian at the British Museum. Hope he may have them for me at 11 on Monday.

Riversdale,

Sept. 3. [1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I had two copies of the introduction—gave one to Eliot and then so corrected the other that I gave that too. I have written to him to send me the first (that I may revise it for you) and keep the second for the printer.

The sea was calm (I had neither to 'like' or dislike the elements) but not my work here. The day before I left I had a wire asking me not to delay. When I arrived priests, mainly country priests, were denouncing the

## Letters

Abbey for blasphemy, calling on the government to withdraw our subsidy and institute a censorship of the stage. Our offense was producing O'Casey's *Silver Tassie*. Meanwhile Dublin was crowding the theatre. The *Silver Tassie* was over, but all our plays are crowded, last Saturday we could have filled the theatre twice over and there are priests in the audience. On Sunday night at a lecture on T. S. Eliot's 'Murder in the Cathedral' an old white-haired priest asked to be introduced to me. On Saturday I had been denounced in the *Standard*, the chief clerical newspaper. The educated Catholics, clerics or laymen, know we are fighting ignorance. They cannot openly support us... I spent a gloomy evening, wondering whether I am as my wife sometimes says 'ruthless'... Forgive all this—it is my reason for not having written before.

Better leave the poems in the order we put them in; an arrangement by subject looks mechanical, especially in a small book.

I will write again when my head is less full of controversy.

My children return to-morrow, probably having quarrelled all the way. They have reached that embarrassing moment in their lives when it is no longer possible to settle things with the fists.

Yrs always,  
W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
Sept. 8. [1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

Here is the 'introduction'.<sup>1</sup> Keep it for me as I would like to compare the corrections with those in the other copy. The correction of prose, because it has no fixed laws, is endless, a poem comes right with a click like a closing box.

<sup>1</sup> To *Selections from Poems by Dorothy Wellesley*.

## Letters

I wrote you a long letter yesterday. I cannot find it—a good letter. Perhaps I posted it. I shall never dare repeat anything out of it for fear I did.

I do not want to delay the 'introduction'.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

Your letter has just come. You are off to France and your book to next year—alas.

I am trying to get my plays done at The Little Theatre in October. If so you will let me come and see you.

I am tired, I have spent the day reading Ezra Pound for the Anthology—a single strained attitude instead of passion, the sexless American professor for all his violence.

I delight in a young poet called George Barker (Faber & Faber) a lovely subtle mind and a rhythmical invention comparable to Gerard Hopkins. . . .

Would you let me get the typed copy of your selections back from Faber & Faber? I have no record of the changes in 'Deserted House'. I want it for the Anthology. If I may, write me a letter of authorisation, or just write to me saying that I may and I will tell Eliot that I have your leave.

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In this little book, Lady Dorothy Wellesley has, at my persuasion, collected from her *Poetry of Ten Years* and from unpublished works, such poems as best represent her, altering, condensing, omitting.

Some months ago, recovering from a long illness I read many anthologies, skipping all the names I knew, discovering what poetry had been written since I was young and read everybody. It was perhaps my illness that made me hard to please, almost all seemed clod-cold, clod-

<sup>1</sup> Enclosed in letter.—D. W.

## *Letters*

heavy. I thought at my worst moments 'I have read too much abstract philosophy, I can no longer understand the poetry of other men' but at my best blamed the poets. Then in an anthology edited by Sir John Squire I found poems signed Dorothy Wellesley. I had never heard of her, but have since discovered that she is well known among the younger poets and critics. I read in excitement that was the more delightful because it showed my fears were groundless. No, I had not lost my understanding of poetry, were not my eyes full of tears? I had opened the book in the middle of a poem called the 'Walled Garden'.

Blue lilies, sprung between three oceans, said:  
'Grinding, and half atilt  
The light-swung boulders rock upon the veldt:  
We bloom by lions dead  
Of old age in the wild.'

Three laboured lines, two Elizabethan in their frenzied grandeur, their rich simplicity of rhythm. Then I came upon 'Horses' well known I think, certainly well known among my Dublin friends though I had never heard of it. I found there in passage after passage a like grandeur, a powerful onrushing masculine rhythm. No accident this time but a work of accomplished skill.

Who, in the garden-pony carrying skeps  
Of grass or fallen leaves, his knees gone slack,  
Round belly, hollow back,  
Sees the Mongolian Tarpan of the Steppes?  
Or, in the Shire with plaits and feathered feet,  
The war-horse like the wind the Tartar knew?  
Or, in the Suffolk Punch, spells out anew  
The wild grey asses fleet  
With stripe from head to tail, and moderate ears?

No poet of my generation would have written 'moderate'

exactly there; the close of a long period, the ear expecting some poetic word checked, delighted to be so checked, by the precision of good prose. Elsewhere in the author's work, I discover that precision. When face to face with the problem that has perplexed us all, she unites a modern subject, a modern vocabulary with traditional richness.

No man thinks only of the noises in the streets, of the smoke of the black country, of the contents of museums, of the misery of the unemployed; Homer and Shakespeare were not more in our fathers' minds than they are in ours. An old diplomatist took me fishing for white trout—alas, I caught nothing—and said between casts, 'Odysseus is always with me'. We must remain natural, writing of those things that belong to our civilization, that are always with us, yet give point and accent from our own research. I was delighted to find a writer who explored the picturesque among flowers, fishes, shells, serpents, trees, horses, or, for its sake returned to the imaginations of her childhood. Edith Sitwell holds like memories in the crooked mirror of her intensity, transforms them into a scene for the Russian ballet, for Aubrey Beardsley's later satiric art, but Lady Dorothy Wellesley presents the actual child not merely in such amusing snatches as 'Great-grandmamma', 'Sheep', 'England', but in descriptions like that in 'The Lost Forest' where the green light of the leaves is sea-water flowing among the trunks, while congers nose the daffodils, a flight of fishes perch upon a cherry bough.

When I sent somebody to Bumpus's for *Poems of Ten Years*, I found that this selection of picturesque detail, this going back was less a literary device, than a love that seemed a part of character, for undisturbed nature, a hatred for the abstract and the invented. Though this love, this hatred, gave its own intensity to poems often beautiful, often obscure, or ill-constructed, it seemed

without purpose or philosophy. Then I came upon 'Matrix', a long meditation that seemed the most moving philosophic poem of our time, and the most moving precisely because its wisdom bulked animal below the waist. In its abrupt lines, passion burst into thought without renouncing its dark quality. I had a moment's jealousy, I had thought of expending my last years on philosophic verse but knew now that I was too old. Only men and women in vigorous vigour<sup>1</sup> can have such hatred of the trivial light. Here was something new or very old, the philosophy of the Vedanta or of Plotinus with a terror not of their time before human destiny; yet its author had never read Plotinus or the Indian thinkers. I was certain of that because of omissions, or an emphasis impossible had she some logical system in mind. No, that terror itself had made poem and philosophy. If man ever had knowledge, or wisdom, it was in the dark of the womb, so 'mine author sang it me', or before he was conceived; in the hush of night are we not conscious of the unconceived. There must be an escape, death is no escape because the dead cannot forget that they have lived and dread to enter into the body once more through the elements, finding there 'the reiteration of birth'. The Greek or Indian solution is touched upon lightly as though it passed through the mind for a moment, then all is passion once again.

Earth, back to the earth.

Out of her beauty at birth,  
Out of her I came  
To lose all that I knew:  
Though somehow at birth I died,  
One night she will teach me anew:

<sup>1</sup> This and certain other expressions were altered by Yeats in the final version of his Preface to the *Selected Poems of D.W.*

*Letters*

Peace? The same,  
As a woman's, a mother's  
Breast undenied, to console,  
The small bones built in the womb,  
The womb that loathed the bones,  
And cast out the soul.

I asked a visitor about Dorothy Wellesley, was discouraged to find her no harassed journalist or teacher. Flaubert talked of writing a story called 'L'Aspirail'. A man who dreamed more and more magnificently as his daily circumstance declined, when that circumstance reached abject poverty, celebrated his marriage to a princess in his sleep. Balzac thought we writers did our best when confined during our formative years to what the eighteenth century called the garrets and cellars. It seems right, bearing that thought in mind, to close this essay murmuring, with better reason than Coleridge knew, 'Where learnt you that heroic measure?'

W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
Sept. 17. [1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

We share our emotion to-day—gloom. The news this morning seems to make war certain. De Valera, out of loyalty to the League, has ranged Ireland on the side of England (the Treaty permits neutrality). It is assumed here that Ireland will send an armed force. Ireland on the side of England and against the country of the Pope! I dread crushing taxation, fewer and fewer people with enough financial independence for intellectual courage.

Let me know if I may get back the typed copy of your poems from Eliot, to select from for the Anthology. (I have not your corrections in 'The Deserted House' and the other poems [in] that group.)

## *Letters*

I lost your birth date and place of birth and so cannot work at your horoscope. It was on a little scrap of paper—the sort of note one makes when one is excited. Send them when you write.

I am absorbed in the Anthology, excited mainly by certain philosophical poems [of W. J. Turner's]. In a series of reveries called 'The Seven Days of the Sun' he recounts the seven ages of man. His philosophy is the same as that in 'Matrix' but what you see objectively he sees in the mirror of his personal experience. Some of the poems are exquisite. I choose the word deliberately—exquisite as a flower or a seabird.

. . . . .

I think much of you, my friend.

Yrs ever,  
W. B. Yeats.

In the Cevennes,  
September 22nd, 1935.

Dear Mr. Yeats,

I wired to you directly I got your letter enclosing the Introduction to my poems. It is impossible to tell you the happiness it brought me.

There are a few suggestions I should like to make as you ask me to do so.

1. I much prefer the first version of your sentence: 'Its wisdom bulked animal below the waist'. The first version you crossed out runs: 'Its wisdom was like the sphinx, animal below the waist'.

2. You say that I hate the abstract and invented. Surely it is rather the artificial that you mean? Though I don't even dislike the artificial if it is exquisite, in fact I love it.

I hope you do not mind my suggesting these small alterations.



## *Letters*

I have not brought any of my books with me, but have been thinking a great deal about your Oxford book. Are you including Flecker's 'Old Ships' and 'The Dying Patriot'? Do consider from the Shropshire Lad: 'Be still, my soul, be still; the arms you bear are brittle'. Have you found the passage from Bridges called 'Come se quando'? It concerns the starry heavens and was I thought in Shorter Poems. Wilfred Owen, 'Strange Meeting', and other names occur to me, Edward Thomas, Stella Gibbons. I have most of these at Penns if you care to come down again and work there when I am back at the end of next week. Have you decided which of my poems you want for the Oxford book? If any of them are among those which were revised for the Selection from D. W. I should very much like to have a chance of considering those revisions again before they go to press.

I never had your long 'good' letter, alas. Please will you repeat all that was in it some day? I hope to see you soon. Is all going well with your play, and are you less tired? I am feeling strong and well, having lived in wild mountains among peasants for a fortnight, but now with perversity begin to look forward to all the things that exhaust me in civilised life. Here the people speak half French half Italian, a hideous tongue, that alas of the Troubadours.

Love.

Yours,

D. W.

Riversdale,

Sept. 25. [1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

The date of my play is Sunday, Oct. 27, at the Little Theatre.

You said I might stay with you for a few days in October. Is that still possible? Could I go to you Oct. 18 or 19?

## *Letters*

I may ask you to help a great project of mine by asking W. J. Turner down for a night. But that depends on how he views my project. I shall get him in London. Here the poet F. R. Higgins and I (his head is full of folk tunes) are publishing at the Cuala Press a series of handpainted broadsides (2/6 each, edition limited to 350), in each a poem by a living Irish poet and a traditional ballad and the music for each and a picture for each. We want to get new or queer verse into circulation, and we shall succeed. The work of Irish poets, quite deliberately put into circulation with its music thirty and more years ago, is now all over the country. The Free State Army march to a tune called 'Down by the Salley Garden' without knowing that the march was first published with words of mine, words that are now folklore. Now my plan is to start a new set of 12 next Spring with poems by English as well as Irish poets. I want to get one of Turner's strange philosophical poems set, let us say, for the bamboo flute (now taught in English schools) and I want Turner (who is a musical critic) to choose other poems and tunes. I have various ways of getting poems sung here. I want to make another attempt to unite literature and music. }

We are accepting into our friendship (but not our theatre) the man we put out. Higgins said to my wife 'I cannot quarrel with the man. I like the way he looks at a glass of porter. He gives it a long look, a delicate look, as though he noticed its colour and the light on it.'

Yours always,  
W. B. Yeats.

I am to go to Penns in the Rocks, we will look through your work for possible songs.

[On envelope] I hope to send you Turner's 'The Seven Days of the Sun' in a couple of days.

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Riversdale,  
Sept. 27. [1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I enclose note from Eliot.

Your letter of Sept. 22 has just come.

Now I am worried. My list of contents, at least, must go to The Oxford Press next week. If I don't put in some of those poems that we altered you will be inadequately represented. I have tried this morning to substitute selections from 'Matrix' but that poem has to be read as a whole. The best thing, seems to me, is to send to The Oxford Press the selections I made some time ago. Then, when I am with you, I can go through them and if necessary ask The Oxford Press to substitute your new versions. It is most important I give you considerable space, and varied representation in this space. I hope to speak of you in my introduction in describing the intense philosophic pre-occupation of recent poetry.

I have to go through the introduction to your selection in any case, it was hurried work and I will do my best to make the changes you want.

I can write no more now—I am in the midst of my day's work but could not go on in comfort until I had tried to settle the difficulty.

The 'good letter' must have gone into the waste paper basket in mistake for something else.

I have found your birth date, and written it on your poems. Your work will come just after T. S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell.

Yrs,  
W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
October 1, 1935.

Dear Lady Dorothy,

Your wire has just come. I had to leave out the extract

## *Letters*

from 'The Lost Forest' because it made the quotations from your work too long. I have put instead a short extract, five or six lines, from 'Matrix', to lead up to 'The Buried Child', the last lines; then I give 'Lenin'. This is the only poem on the list except 'The Thorn Tree' ('Cousin') which has been altered, unless we count the few lines in 'Fire'. I want 'Lenin', and in its present concentrated form, because it will, I think, help the general acceptance of your work. There are a certain number of revolutionary ignoramuses who will be surprised to find it there; besides, it is a powerful little poem. 'Lenin' and the religious wind-up to 'Fishing' go amusingly together.

I have typed this to save time. I was dictating an essay. I found I had given more from you than from anybody else and this would not do, people would think it was friendship, especially as, I think, you come immediately before T. S. Elliot.

I must send this off to the post now. I am overwhelmed with work.

Yrs,  
W. B. Yeats.

Penns in the Rocks,  
October 1st, 1935.

Dear Mr. Yeats,

May I write as one poet to another? I will confess that I am heartened to find that 'Fire' stands almost as it was drafted. This gives me hope that in future I may find my way without inconsequent thought or irrelevant decoration. My head is full of new verse, singing, pounding even in my ears, but practical affairs must be dealt with. Do you think that inspiration can be lost if not born with the first birth-pang? I fear this may be so. But perhaps no inspiration is ever lost, but recurs months,

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perhaps years later. It seems to me that poetry is begotten of a tune. More and more deeply I feel this, have never really doubted it.

Your friend,  
D. W.

PS. This place is lovely to return to. It consoles me for the vagabond life I lived when abroad—hard beds, hard hills, beautiful churches, Madonna on the mountain side, rough good food, pure wine.

Penns in the Rocks,  
October 1st, 1935.

Dear Mr. Yeats,

. . . I am most interested in your project.<sup>1</sup> Do come here the 17th, 18th or 19th for the week-end or at any time, with or without Turner. I would like to know him; his intelligence has always arrested me. I shall be coming to your first night with friends. Will you join me and come on to supper afterwards at the Café Royal? Whom shall I ask; and will you bring someone? I like most men better than most women.

I am thinking of your song book, and hope for ideas. Forgive a scrawl, am patiently settling down to daily routine in rain and wind.

Your friend,  
D. W.

Riversdale,  
Oct. 8. [1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I write on this paper [Abbey Theatre] because I think you may never have seen our fine trade-mark, the work of Mrs. Darwen, when a Miss Monsel. I found it in her portfolio many years ago. Why I want to call that poem *Judas Tree*<sup>2</sup> is to echo *Thorn Tree* and so bring out the pattern

<sup>1</sup> Broad-sides.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Morning After.'

## *Letters*

which unites the two poems. I print them together but we can discuss that when we meet. I wonder if I<sup>f</sup> may make nearly as long a visit as I did before? We have so much to talk of, my dear, and I am going away for so many months (unless some nation corks the Mediterranean before Nov. 1). I like what you say about poetry being begotten of a tune. I have just finished an essay on this subject which I will show you. You ask if inspiration can be lost; no, not when creation has started (then it goes on like the child in the womb). One of the two reasons why I am going to Majorca is that if I can start a great momentum to write, I can go on even in this turmoil. The other reason is health. I cannot stand any more turmoil or cold wind. I have not yet sent you, or done anything about your script for Faber because I am overworked finishing the Anthology and other things (my wife types much of the contents). On Sunday I suddenly became dizzy, I had to be helped into the house. In other words work has literally knocked me silly. I was all right in a minute and that night read out the passage in 'Matrix' about love to the only swashbuckler in my immediate circle, a man who fought England under Collins but says now 'I pray every night that I may be given a chance to kill Italians'. He delighted in those lines about love. He has only two interests, war and woman, and that keeps him vital. It is curious that those two interests have always gone together. Do you know my couplet

The sword, a cross; thereon He died:  
On breast of Mars the goddess sighed.

That other better couplet

Gold-sewn silk on the sword-blade  
Beauty and fool together laid.

That supper is a kind thought, if I bring anybody it will

## *Letters*

be after I have consulted you. If this play succeeds, and indeed in any case, I shall have to delay a few minutes, for I must thank the players.

I shall try and send you that script to-morrow and then post, if I can find a big envelope, a strange book by Turner. Read the section called 'Thursday'. It is your own philosophy, all that exists created by desire, everything therefore a symbol of conscious supernatural powers.

Yrs always,  
W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
Oct. 9. [1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I send back the Faber script. There is only one typist here who can do literary work and she, because she has a lot of political work, is slow.

I have put into the Faber script the three poems you asked me to add, 'Question and Answer'—and the two I have named 'Thorn Tree' and 'Judas Tree'. I think you should leave these two where I have put them, after 'The Buried Child', that they may echo the theme in 'Tryst'. The only other conditions I have as to the order of the poems are that 'Fire' should come first and 'Lenin' follow 'Fishing'.

As I was starting on 'Question and Answer' I noted on the back of it 'A Dream' a fine poem spoilt by its last line. Why not put the last verse as follows?

But come into his dream, at night:  
That little child and she;  
And O how sweet a cradle song  
Croons in the night sea.<sup>1</sup>

It is then one of your best poems, and should go into the selections. It is a queer thing that the folk lilt lost since

<sup>1</sup> I did not agree, and the poem was not included.—D. W.

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the time of Burns has been discovered in our time. The essay I told you I was writing on tune and poetry is for the bound volume of the present *Cuala Broadsides* and done in collaboration with F. R. Higgins who is a fine folk musician. We show that even the poet who thinks himself ignorant of music will sometime write unconsciously to tunes.

I am writing in bed that I may rest but soon must get up to write a broadcast in reply to questions from a journalist. I do not know what the Broadcast is to be about. For years the director of Broadcasting in the Free State has been hostile to my movement, players and writers have had to broadcast from Belfast. He has been put out and a friend of mine put in so broadcast I must to encourage the man, or his friendship may chill.

Yrs ever,

W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
Oct. 14. [1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I must apologise for the household. My wife promised to send you [the] Faber script this day week but I have just found it. It is now I believe posted. My wife has been greatly overworked, typing large parts of my *Anthology*, etc.

I have had your telegram and have wired to the Sec. of the Little Theatre to know if the general public are admitted. If they are not I will find what seats I can get as author. I will write or wire result.

If I do not write or wire to the contrary I shall be with you next Saturday.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.



*Letters*

Riversdale,  
October 15, 1935.

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I have to have a slight operation to-morrow, I had no idea such a thing was necessary until to-day. It will be done with a local anaesthetic and I should be able to get away in a few days. I will let you know as soon as I know anything definite. I am afraid my change of plans may cause you inconvenience. I can only say how sorry I am.

Yours,

W. B. Yeats.

I am looking over the Introduction to my Anthology. I have compared you, Turner, Herbert Read, quoting you and Turner.

Please tell nobody about my operation. It would go round at once in an exaggerated form.

Riversdale,  
October 20, 1935.

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I have just been given Faber and Faber's letter about your book; my wife had held it back for three days as I was ill from the operation.

Of course bringing your book to Faber and Faber was very definitely sending the wooden horse into Troy. T. S. Eliot was I know in favour of its acceptance; I would like to see him about it. I think the reason which he gives in his letter, which I enclose, is probably quite sincere. They are concentrating on a certain type of poetry. This winter they are about to bring out a volume of MacNeice, an extreme radical; your book might interfere. If this is so a financial guarantee would not help matters. All this I can find out when I get to London. Do nothing until we have talked the matter over.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

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PS. I am making your work and Turner's the main substance in my analysis of what I consider the most typical movement in recent poetry. I give you considerable space in my introduction to the Anthology.

Riversdale,  
October 24, 1935.

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I am now quite well and am crossing to London by Liverpool to-night. I am hoping to see Turner tomorrow at lunch and shall be busy with odds and ends until Sunday night. When I said I was quite well I meant of the operation, I am struggling with a slight cold, and as such things are liable to become serious for me in this climate and season, do not count on me for your Sunday night party. I will come if I can, and it is very kind of you to think of it. May I come to you on Thursday for a few days? I have to get an injection in London on Wednesday.

Do not be depressed about the Faber refusal. I find they are bringing out an anthology and I gather from various indications that it will be ultra-radical, its contents having been all approved by Robert Graves and Laura Riding. We will discuss another publisher when I see you.

Forgive me dictating this but [there] is so much to do before I start.

Yrs,  
W. B. Yeats.

Penns in the Rocks,  
October 24th, 1935.

Dear Mr. Yeats,

I would like to dedicate 'Fire' to you, but do not like to suggest it. May I, or would you rather I did not?

Yours,  
D. W.

## Letters

Riversdale,  
15 Nov. [1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

My wife and I looked at your horoscope the other night. When I am through with my book I will send you some kind of judgment. It has greatly surprized me, your profile gives a false impression, it suggests cumulative energy, masculinity. You are not sensual, but emotional, greatly wishing to please and to be pleased; fundamental common sense but too impatient for good judgment until deliberation call up this common sense; deeply imaginative but the star that gives this makes drugs attractive.<sup>1</sup> (I knew a woman with this star ( $\psi$ ) placed as in your horoscope and I threw her bottle of cloriform into the Thames—she had soaked her pocket handkerchief in it and clapped it over my mouth to see what would happen. At the same time, so far as I knew, she did herself no harm.) You have a Roman mask and from its eyes looks out an exceedingly feminine nature. I think, starting now and for several months, you will create, because  $\psi$  or Neptune is passing over parts of your horoscope.

Yes, I am deep in my work, writing in bed every day from 9.30 till 12; after that I can read, or I can write letters but do no more creative work. I am counting every moment until Nov. 29 when my boat sails. The very fact that I am going with a man whose mind I touch on only one point, means peace. I can live in my own mind and write poetry; can go into a dream and stay there.

When I had added a paragraph to my account of Turner, objecting to what he said about Lady —, I forgave him. He was no more malicious than a butterfly-hunter, before the day of collectors' poison-bottles, putting a pin through a peacock butterfly or a red

<sup>1</sup> Fortunately I have been able to resist this temptation, of which I am unaware.—D. W.

## *Letters*

admiral. I was upset and therefore a dull man when you saw me.

I have finished my account of you—it is longer than I thought it would [be]—here is the present calculation of number of pages. T. S. Elliot 14½ pages, Turner 17 pages, Lady Dorothy 17½ pages, Edith Sitwell 19 pages but nobody will count.

Yrs always,  
W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
Monday. [Nov. 18, 1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

It has just come into my head that I never wrote you 'a bread and butter letter'—the fact that we were about to meet at dinner must have put it out of my head.

Penns in the Rocks is the perfect country house, lettered peace and one's first steps out of doors into a scene umbrageous, beautiful (I take those words from Carlyle's description of my native country). You have brought a new pleasure and interest into my life and I thank you.

I send you under another cover some Broad-sides, songs with their music, that to the traditional songs, mostly never printed before, this to the songs of living poets mostly newly composed. The pictures by Dublin artists are all hand-coloured by my sister's girls. As I told you we shall follow with a second series of Irish and English poets.

Yrs,  
W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
Nov. 23, 1935.

Dear Lady Dorothy,

Thanks for the dedication of 'Fire' which I appreciate very much. The version is improved, but I want to suggest two changes. Near the top of page 7 you have an

## *Letters*

indented line 'And the wind is wild'; I want to leave that line out, it holds up the speed and is too obviously put in to rhyme with 'child' which does quite well as an unrhymed line. The other change is at the beginning: I want to put a mark of exclamation after 'Modern man!' without that it looks as if 'Modern man' was the 'core of life'.

I am dictating to save time, I start next Thursday, and am in the midst of the final work on the anthology.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

I will write from Majorca and give you my address there. I do not yet know where I shall stay—an hotel for the first few days then some sort of lodging.

Riversdale,

Nov. 28. [1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I have heard from Harold Macmillan, I heard on Saturday on his return from election work. He wants you to send the copy to him. But for his election I could have sent it weeks ago and argued the matter out.

I return Introduction corrected.

I await Friday with longing, on that day a curtain blots out all my public life, theatre, academy, Cuala. My work on the anthology is finished—the rest, the business arrangements, are my wife's task. I have a three-act tragicomedy in my head to write in Majorca, not in blank verse but in short line like 'Fire' but a larger number of four stress lines—as wild a play as 'Player Queen', as amusing but more tragedy and philosophic depth. But first I must rest a week or two—too much has happened of late.

I am planning a new life, four months in every year in some distant spot and nothing to do but poetry—the rest of the year mainly in Dublin and work for my family. Why do you not own a coral island? My public life I will

## Letters

pare down to almost nothing. My imagination is on fire again.

I have asked Macmillan to send you my new book. I don't like it—it is a fragment of the past I had to get rid of. The swift rhythm of 'Fire', and the study of rhythm my work for the anthology entailed, have opened my door. I shall get through if for the next four months there are no events except in my mind and perhaps an occasional motor drive. Once I am through the door I can face the storm.

I told my wife that I would reply to your letter. She comes with me to Liverpool to see me start.

Yrs always,

W. B. Yeats.

I will write from Majorca and send you my address there. It is not yet decided upon.

Penns in the Rocks,

Nov. 19/35.<sup>1</sup>

Your letter came yesterday, the day you must have had mine. Thank you for taking trouble about the horoscope. You should not have done it, being tired. I also think it surprising. It leaves out altogether the element which makes life so difficult for me, alternation of gaiety and gloom, humanity and philosophic detachment, and no middle distance it seems. Common sense keeps me fairly level. Which star is this?

You must be longing to escape through the 'door' you speak of into your other life.

I am sending another version of 'Fire' for the Oxford Book. The thought is clearer. I have sent it to the *Criterion* who will doubtless refuse it.

My love,

PS. They did.

D.

<sup>1</sup> Completed and posted later.

## Letters

Penns in the Rocks,  
December 10th, 1935.

My dear Mr. Yeats,

To-day I have news of you at last, most kindly from Mrs. Yeats. I have wondered whether you would reach Majorca sound in wind and limb. Biscay must have tired you, the bitter gales. Have you time to send a line about yourself? I miss you, this island seems empty without you. I hope your southern island is treating you better.

Thank you for *Full Moon in March* with the author's compliments. It is very beautiful. The Supernatural Songs, 'Prayer for Old Age', and the Attendants' song in the 'King of the Great Clock Tower' move me most at present. I also have the Irish Broad-sides from Mrs. Yeats. They are enchanting.

I have studied closely your selections from my poems, which as you will remember we cut up hurriedly those lovely summer days. (Do you remember the scraps of paper flying all over the lawn? and diving into the cran-nies of the rocks?) The whole typescript is now with Harold Macmillan, with a letter of explanation. I have made some minor changes in a few poems. For instance in 'Snakes' I have omitted the six lines 'What hope for man' and continue from 'a bride's attire' to 'Fair Women'. This seemed to me a 'Yeats revision'. I side-track too much, and am finding courage to cut out yet more and more since our conversations. I have added to the *Speed Track on the Wash*. Will you approve? But I don't suppose you have my poems with you. If you have I will send a list of revisions when I hear from Macmillan. But I do not like to trouble you with any work but your own, hoping you have passed, as you say, 'through the doorway into your dream'.

I flirt with my Muse but she has evidently quarrelled with me. My half-born poem left me and I am dejected.

## Letters

It was crowded out by practical people—the old story. I am asking Mrs. Yeats if she has a spare typed script of your Introduction to the Oxford Book. You stopped reading it to me about half-way through. I suppose this is incorrect of me, but my curiosity is unbearable. Anyway Mrs. Yeats will decide. No one else will see it.

Here it is cold, wet, snowy, damp, dark, damnable. This letter brings you my love.

D. W.

Hotel Terramar,  
Palma de Mallorca,  
España,  
Dec. 16. [1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I have been here for the last three days, after a brief stay in town. I work in my bed till noon at a verse play, though as yet it is but prose scenario—very wild but I think well constructed. I think of writing for the first time in sprung verse (four stresses) with a certain amount of rhyme, part may be in the verse of your 'Fire'. Shri Purohit Swami is with me, and the play is his philosophy in a fable, or mine confirmed by him. Every afternoon I go through his translation of the *Upanishads*. It is 2.45 and he comes to my room at 3 with his MSS. We have both drunk very strong coffee to keep ourselves awake having formed the habit of afternoon sleep after our sea voyage which was the stormiest I have ever known and left us worn out. I hear his step.

Dec. 17.

My days are as full now of creative impulse as they were, when in Dublin, of distractions, but there is nothing to record—always the same bright white walls and blue sea, the same struggle to keep Shri Swami from treating me as an invalid; if I would let him I should be helped up and



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downstairs because the holding on and balancing, during four days of storm, upset my heart a little.

Write to me and tell me about Macmillan—I waited till Nov. 18 when I knew he returned from electioneering before writing him.

I sent the corrected introduction to my wife some days ago and the anthology is now I have no doubt with the publishers.

Yrs ever,

W. B. Yeats.

Robert Graves wrote the other day to two people who sent him a letter of introduction 'If you are the couple I saw on the beach yesterday afternoon, I don't want to know you'.

Hotel Terramar,  
Dec. 21. [1935.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I did not bring your poems, I put a copy out to bring and forgot—I wish now I had it and could follow your amendations. Force yourself to write, even if you write badly at first. The first verse after long inaction is in my case almost always artificial, and then it branches out. The prose version of 'The King of the Great Clock Tower' was written to force myself to write lyrics. Yesterday I finished the scenario of my new play and to-day began the verse. It has begun well, but much of it will I am certain be artificial till I re-write and re-write. I am writing in short lines but think that I shall not use 'sprung verse'—now that I am close to it I dislike the constant uncertainty as to where the accent falls; it seems to make the verse vague and weak. I like a strong driving force. If there should be a subtle hesitating rhythm I can make it. I do not want it as part of the metrical scheme. I shall write 'sprung verse' only if I find it comes spontaneously—if a foot of four syllables seems natural I shall know I am in

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for it. My play will I think be a full evening's entertainment if it is ever played—my first full length play. One of the characters is a donkey, represented by a toy donkey with wheels but life size. I am trusting to this play to give me a new mass of thought and feeling overflowing into lyrics (these are now in play).

I am delighted with my life here. I breakfast at 7.30 and write in bed until 11 or 11.30. From 3 to 4 I help Purohit Swami to translate the *Upanishads*. It is amusing to see his delighted astonishment when he discovers that he can call a goddess, 'this handsome girl' or even 'a pretty girl' instead of a 'maiden of surpassing loveliness'. I say to him 'think like a wise man but express yourself like the common people' and the result is that he will make the first great translation of the *Upanishads*. He takes great care of me and always walks slowly up and downstairs in front of me, very wide and impassable in his orange robe, for fear I may walk too fast for my heart.

You have the best language among us because you most completely follow Aristotle's advice and write 'like the common people'. You have the animation of spoken words and spoken syntax. The worst language is Elliot's in all his early poems—a level flatness of rhythm. I have said of you in my essay that you have 'lucky eyes and a full sail' or some such words. Some day I shall say much more of you than I can say now. If I said much now, seeing that you have not — —'s disarming appearance, I would only defeat my own purpose. — —'s appearance has great privileges.

Turner wrote an admirable review of the *Broadsides* in *The New Statesman* of Dec. 17. Read if you chance on it; he is to some extent fighting all our battles.

Shri Swami has just come in with his *Upanishads*.

Yrs always,  
W. B. Yeats.

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Hotel Terramar,  
Dec. 22 (I think).

Dear Lady Dorothy,

When I wrote yesterday that you had a more natural style than the rest of us, I was thinking mainly of 'Fire' which I am trying to emulate in my play. I do not know whether it is the change from your three stress lines to four stress, or sheer incapacity to handle a natural speech, but I have hitherto failed to do so. I re-wrote a longish scene to-day, keeping 'Fire' in my mind. With you it is not a question of the speech of the common people—as with Synge and Lady Gregory—but the common speech of the people.

I enclose Turner's article on *Broadsides*.

Yrs ever,

W. B. Yeats.

You get much of your effect from a spare use of adjectives and the using as much as possible such necessary and usual ones as in 'Modern Man', 'Cheap Jewel', mere statements of fact. It gives your work objectivity.

## COMMENTS AND CONVERSATIONS

AT the end of the year in which I first met Yeats, I will set down here, before continuing this correspondence, a few impressions of this period. I give them in the form in which they were jotted down at the time.

W. B. Y. speaks like Zeus. Within two minutes of our first meeting at my house he said: 'You must sacrifice everything and everyone to your poetry.' I replied: 'I have children and cannot.'

W. B. Y.'s conversation is very difficult to fix in the mind or to reproduce on paper. This is because his flow of talk never ceases for sixty seconds. I find myself trying to fix an anecdote, a flight of fancy, a philosophical digression in my mind, but at once he is off again, half-way through something fresh, and I am left behind reflecting on the last, or last but one, or two, or three utterances and have now missed the name, time and place of the present utterance. What would Boswell do? Learn shorthand.

W. B. Y. is for ever trying to revise my poems. We have quarrelled about this. I say to him: 'I prefer bad poems written by myself to good poems written by you under my name.' When he has made a suggestion for altering a certain line in my verses and I demur saying: 'I shall make a note saying this line was altered by W. B. Y. otherwise I am cheating', he says, 'No! it has always been done in a company of poets', which is true. He adds:

## Letters

'Lady Gregory wrote the end of my "Deirdre" on my fundamental mass'.

However I shall do as I intend.

He tells me this story:

Mrs. Humphry Ward wrote to the Editor of the *Yellow Book* demanding that Aubrey Beardsley should be dismissed as Art Editor, on the grounds that she 'owed this to her public'. Beardsley was dismissed. W. B. Y. says: 'After this Beardsley went to pieces. He died at twenty-six after revolutionising the black and white art of the whole world.'

To this I might add that his mother, Mrs. Beardsley, would have died in penury had it not been for the gifts of anonymous friends. The story of his sister and of her death is recorded in Yeats's sequence of poems 'To a Dying Lady'.

He tells me what he calls the finest short story in the world, by Oscar Wilde, as it was told by Oscar Wilde when he first invented it. 'Jesus Christ came over a plain to a great city. Entering the gate he saw leaning on a window sill a young man who was drunk; "Young man, why do you dissolve your soul in drink?" "Lord, I was a leper and you healed me, what else can I do?" Jesus went further into the city and seeing a young man following a harlot said, "Young man, why do you dissipate your soul in vice?" "Lord, I was blind and you gave me sight, what else can I do?" Then Jesus came into the market place and saw sitting upon the ground a young man weeping; "Young man, why do you weep?" "Lord, I was dead and you brought me to life, what else can I do but weep?"' This story elaborated and ruined can be found in Wilde's work. W. B. Y. tells me that when he first heard Wilde tell it in table talk Wilde said, 'Jesus

Christ came over a great plain to a purple city I believe that apart from this correction I have set the story down verbatim.

He liked this story which I told him. Maurice Hewlett said to Sidney Colvin at a party, 'Who is that ass at the other end of the room?' Sidney Colvin replied with majesty, 'That is Stephen Phillips. We are all agreed that the genius of Shakespeare, the power of Michelangelo and the tenderness of Raphael are united in that one noble brow.'

We were sitting in the garden talking of Irish politics when he suddenly said: 'You should leave out "elements" in "Fire" (my poem), in the 2nd and 3rd repetitions. The first statement is enough: "Anaximines added Air to the elements".' I think he is right. 'What made you think of that suddenly?' I asked. 'Poetry is always present in my mind.' We then agreed that great rapidity of mind which gives the average person the impression of disordered thinking, or lack of concentration, is a marked characteristic of the poetic mind. He has it himself most strongly marked.

Speaking of Joan of Arc he made a number of points which appeared to me so interesting that I asked him to write them down. Here they are:

I. Why did St. Joan when asked to choose a coat of arms for her brother select the Ace of Swords from the Tarot? (*Tarocco*: ancient playing cards.)

II. Why was 'Blue Beard' (Gilles de Rais) her friend and confidant?

III. What significance should we put on the statement made by her accusers that she saw innumerable heavenly

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spirits in a bucket, and that the spirits that were with her were diminutive?

IV. Did her mother descend from a noble Florentine family? Was her mother a member of the third Order of St. Francis at a time when they expected a female?

V. In conclusion had St. Joan any connexion with the ancient pagan faith of France? Did the soldiers in some sense still hold that faith?

The last query would seem to explain in a great measure the miracle of Saint Joan.

Penns in the Rocks,  
January 16th, 1936.

Dear Mr. Yeats,

So far I have no news from Macmillan about our book,<sup>1</sup> . . . I am sitting to Rothenstein, undiluted agony, though he doesn't know it. He measures my nose, explores my eyes with a magnifying glass, and photographs close up every hair on my head. This is because he is anxious to do a better drawing than the last, which I think is the image of me.

I too am forcing myself to write lyrics but am not pleased with them. I call them *Songs for Street Corners*. They are in part obscene, tragical, knockabout. So far the rhythm is too easy. I dare not send you anything yet. Are you well?

January 22nd.

I caught flu and never sent this letter. Forgive pencil, am still in bed.

PS. Kipling goes to the Poets' Corner, and George V beside Henry VIII. In London Robert Graves is called Graves Supérieur.

Your loving friend,  
D.

<sup>1</sup> *Selected Poems*.

## Letters

Hotel Terramar,

[Jan. 19th or 20th, 1936.]

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I have had an unexpected attack, breathing became difficult and painful. I sent for a very able Spanish doctor, who stopped all writing and cured me by more or less drastic treatment. He says that the enlargement of my heart is very slight but that my heart misses a beat and that this has come about through the overwork of years and should not be incurable. It seems I turn my food to poison or as the Swami put[s] it before I ever saw the doctor, 'Give grass to a cow and the cow turns it into milk, give milk to a serpent and the serpent turns it into poison. Give an ageing man food and he turns it into poison.' The Swami is always profound and unexpected.

This with the exception of a letter to my wife is the first letter I have written since my illness. I have been too unwell to go through your corrections on the poems. This is the first morning on which I have felt well. I shall write again about the poems.

The Swami is a constant instruction and delight. He puts sugger in his soup, in his salad, in his vegetables, and then unexpectedly puts salt on stewed pares. Sometimes he mixes salt, sugger and pepper merely I think because his eyes light upon them. He says 'I like all the six flavours but prefer sugger'.

Our translation of the *Upanishads* is going to be the classic translation, you especially perhaps will find it exciting.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.



Letters

Hotel Terramar,  
Jan. 26.

Dear Lady Dorothy,

The emendations are almost all those we made together but you have made some new ones which are a great improvement.

There is no hurry. I don't think my wife has yet sent my copy to the Clarendon Press.

I did not write before because I was not well enough to think over your corrections. I waited till I felt it would be a pleasure. Yesterday I read you with great pleasure though I was panting (asthma I think though the doctor says something else) and though I sat bolt upright and wide awake panting till 3 this morning it is a pleasure to write to-day. The sun is shining and in a couple of hours (I write in bed 9.30) I shall be on the sea shore helping the Swami to translate the *Upanishads*. By the by he is an excellent doctor, understanding the body from its first principles—or so it seems to me.

The doctor has stopped my creative work. I have finished Act 1 of my play, a scene of Act 2 and rather a good lyric.

Do not think I have forgotten you or ever can. For about twelve days I wrote no letters—I was in considerable pain part of the time and incapable of effort the rest. Then until to-day your letters were lost; at last I begin to believe in my recovery, to believe that I shall not be a useless hulk for friends and relatives to haul about and stumble over.

Lawrence's *Odyssey* is the only serious literature I have and that I read constantly. It is made all the more living by the fact that it describes the world in which the Swami has lived much of his life. He thinks about the gods as Homer thought, and illustrates his belief with delightful tales and memories. I wish you could hear

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him, his tales come slowly, they must be waited for, yet there is enough there to restore the poetry of the world. I delight in his folk lore even more than in his philosophy.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

Dictated.

Hotel Terramar,  
1.2.1936.

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I find that there have been accounts of my illness in the English papers. I am now convalescent. Immediately after writing to you I had a severe attack of breathlessness and was for a couple of days in danger. The doctor wired for my wife, who arrives to-morrow. I will write in a couple of days. I am dictating this letter to Shri Purohit Swami.

I would like to see those 'street corner songs': I might not think the rhythm best.

Yours,  
W. B. Yeats.

Penns in the Rocks,  
February 14th, 1936.

Dear Mr. Yeats,

I was so relieved to hear from Mrs. Yeats yesterday that you were much better. . . .

I was at Ottoline's last week, where I met James Stephens. The moment he saw me he said, 'Blake is the only English genius'. I said, 'Then Shakespeare was not a genius?' 'No', he replied, 'because he knew too well what he was doing.' I said, 'Then you think that only the semi-mad have genius? Perhaps you are right. You see I am purely English and probably cannot judge.' He turned in his toes and we started away hammer and

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tongs. He said he doubted if Shakespeare wrote 'The Phoenix and the Turtle'. I had quoted this as an instance of Shakespeare's instability (hoping to take him in, for of course that poem is the most closely reasoned in the English tongue and plain to be understood): 'more likely written by Donne, if you must have it that way, but do the dates fit?' Suddenly he said, 'I see I am too well understood' and vanished as suddenly as he had appeared. I liked him and must meet him again. I arose to confront the august figure of Sturge Moore, who at once started talking about you.

Your affectionate,

D.

PS. Will you not call me Dorothy plain? My cold and other people's colds have checked poetry for the moment.

Hotel Terramar,

February 16th, 1936.

Dear Lady Dorothy,

Anne told me you had telegraphed and that she had wired to you that I had left for Majorca.

Willy is better I think, but it is going to be a long business. He has kidney trouble (Nephritis) and his heart is not good, also his lungs do not expand as they should although there is no congestion. To-day his breathing is very much easier. He had two bad days of gasping this last week. . . .

That first announcement in the papers was monstrous; I saw a garbled version of it in a Spanish paper on my way through Barcelona. It frightened all Willy's friends and should never have been issued.

Willy sends his love and will dictate a letter when he is able. He hopes you will write and say how you are.

Yours sincerely,

George Yeats.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Yeats.

## Letters

Penns in the Rocks,  
March 4th, 1936.

Dear Mr. Yeats,

I look each morning for the Majorca stamp. Perhaps Mrs. Yeats will be kind and send news. I have a sense that things are being very difficult out there but hope I am wrong.

I am off myself next week to the south somewhere, but letters will follow. William Rothenstein has been here to do the drawing for *Selected Poems*. The result I hope will please you. Hilda Matheson and my daughter like it, but I still prefer the old one, although the new one is no doubt a better drawing.

Someone is cramming ——— down my throat and I spent hours in some sleepless watch of the night studying this woman's brain, hoping I should become exhausted and so sleep. A brain she has, but Lord! what a bore! And God! what a sense of strain! The modern intellectual will surely go down to posterity as a tortuous creature. They make me feel like a child, or, as Rothenstein puts it, 'a pure artist'. I have had so many colds and so much business that my writing came to an end. I have a few verses to send to you next week. Perhaps peace and withdrawal from active life in some remote corner of the south will wake me up. I have saved by twenty-four hours this little corner of Sussex from a town of scarlet bungalows. So I now own the lovely ridge opposite<sup>1</sup> and feel I have done something for 'Deserted House'. This is Penns news and takes you my love as always.

Your affectionate friend,  
D.

<sup>1</sup> This fact explains what might otherwise be an obscurity in W. B. Y.'s poem 'To D. W.' (*Last Poems*. See also page 93).

For now the horizon 's bought strange dogs are still.

I have never understood, however, what he meant by the last half of the line, unless he had a fantastic idea that after buying the few acres I evicted the people who lived on it, together with their dogs!—D. W.

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[Banyuls-sur-mer]  
France,  
April 1/36.

Dear Mr. Yeats,

I wired to you to-day, Mrs. Yeats' letter having just reached me in Southern France, Côte Vermeille. So relieved to hear news of you but very sorry you are to stay on in Majorca. You sound better. Do you like your pram? The only thing to do is to keep quiet for a time; it is difficult isn't it? Do rhythms run in your head I wonder? I started from England hoping my head would become a regular beehive. But alas my 3 weeks (nearly up) have been spent in getting strong again. Am free from colds for the first time in 5 months. Hilda Matheson and I are tramping the sea roads and little towns in the hills; some with great Cathedrals of the 10th and 11th centuries from which the world the flesh and the devil and the saints have long departed, leaving only the fishermen with their painted boats and the women mending nets upon the shore. I find a great sense of peace here. If only one could hold this when one gets back to the uncivilized world, of telephones and wireless and anxiety. I find it difficult even here where papers are few (& probably false) to keep war out of mind. One hugs one's peace for the moment. I look across the sea and think of you, wish I could cross over to reach you. Is your Indian still there? Do you want books? I could send anything when I get home next week. Is there anything I can do in any way to help?

Please tell  
your  
loving friend,  
D. W.

*Letters*

Casa Pastor,  
San Agustin,  
Palma-de-Mallorca,  
Spain,  
[April 6, 1936].

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I am convalescent; in a pleasant hill-side villa; from a wide balcony I look out over a great stretch of very blue sea. Little remains of my illness except weakness; the doctor assures me that in a little while I shall be better than I have been for a long time. My heart is normal. The drawback is that I shall have a long list of things I must not eat. I imagine myself unrolling at a restaurant something like a ballad singer's sheet at a fair. There was a consultation & one doctor was a monarchist, the other a socialist & it needed the energy of the British consul to make them meet (my wife had selected the socialist on expert London advice) & they disagreed as to the cause of my illness & both theories are allowed for in the list of forbidden foods.

Rothenstein has sent a photograph of the new portrait; it is more like you, except that it gives you a slightly acid look though combined with much sensitiveness. The old portrait was the more impressive, but this is more personal & more intimate—tho I incline for the old portrait. I wish however I had a photograph of the other to put beside it to judge of the effect of reducing the coloured chalk to black and white. At present I feel that I would sooner put a reproduction of the old portrait over my mantelpiece—it has a stronger public appeal.

In my introduction to the translation of *The Upanishads* Purohit Swami & I are working at I think I shall take up once more the theme of the sudden return of philosophy into English literature round about 1925. I will speak again of you & of Turner, adding Huxley's *Barren Leaves*, which has the pessimism of modern philosophy. I read

## Letters

it a couple of weeks ago—it has historical significance but is not I think a lasting work. Its style belongs to the previous movement—it has precision but no rhythms—there is not a single sentence anybody will ever murmur to himself.

Can you recommend me some novels of the first intensity written in the last few years? I want to study the prose as I have studied the verse of contemporary writers—now that I have much time on my hands is a good moment. I want especially the names of any books that are philosophies as *Barren Leaves* is. *The Edwardians*, which I have just read, of course is not; it is the social satire of the previous movement. Behind Huxley's satire is a satire which has for theme the whole of life. Miss Sackville West sees only the futility of her own class—& all that is admirable, but O those radical critics—O that Augustus John model who loves the duke but refuses to be a duchess or to receive a thousand a year out of Bohemian frenzy; O that Arctic explorer who carries through two voyages to the South Pole 'a derisive expression'. Fundamentally I hate the book, the hero is passive & the assumption throughout is that everybody is passive. It is not true that it is easier to live a profound life in an arctic hut than at Knowle, unless the arctic hut means the ascetic's contemplation. Do you remember that phrase in one of Dante's letters 'Cannot I anywhere look upon the stars & think the sweet thoughts of philosophy'? Some few of us, you, Turner, I have in the very core of our being the certainty that man's soul is active. I find this dialogue in the *Upanishad*: 'I want to think'. 'You cannot think without faith.' 'How can I get faith?' 'You cannot get faith without action.' 'How learn to act?' 'Be happy.' (I have a little condensed it but not much.)

I said I hate the book yet I admire it immensely. I am getting another of her novels from the local library.

## Letters

Remember me to Miss Matheson if she is still with you. The B.B.C. must have given her great powers of command; tell her to set you to work every day at 11 A.M. & never let you rise from your writing-table until you have written at least one line. But you are ill or have been & perhaps I am heartless to suggest even one line.

Yrs affly,

W. B. Yeats.

I have just read through your letters. In one you speak of having written some new verses & say that you would send them. They have not come. I think you alone of our present poets are 'natural'. I may point out to you one or two places where in my selections from your work the thought is good, but the words are not in their natural order—'the natural words in the natural order' is the formula. I would never alter a fine passage to conform to formula but one gets careless in connecting passages and then formula helps.

Penns in the Rocks,  
Withyham,  
Sussex,

April 9.

My dear Mr. Yeats,

Thank God for your writing, instead of opening *The Times* every morning to see if you are alive or dead. I have been very anxious. You sound splendid. Please go slowly. I wish I were back in the South. Here it is bitter cold with threatening snow. Though I love to be back again in this lovely place screened by its woods and little hills. This is only a note to catch the post to-day. Am just off to see V. Sackville West with your letter in my pocket.

Yes I wrote a few verses and will send these in a few days. I don't care for them, they seem only a germ of something still to come. You must study Virginia Woolf's



## Letters

books, *all of them*. Send a line to say which you want. Did you read *Waves*? she has rhythm. Did you read *Orlando*, her novel about V. Sackville West; or her *Common Reader*? 2 vols. Yes V. S. W. and I rebelled against our upbringing. You are right about the Arctic hut, and Knole, or Lumley. My inner life was the same at Lumley or Park Lane as it is now. Still we couldn't go on living like that for ever. Edith Sitwell too was reared in a stately home, and one finds only its delightful results in her work; for which I admire her. She is a very pure artist.

Will write again in 2 days.

Yr. affecte,  
D.

PS. Yes you are right. One must remain active. I would rather be dead than passive.

Penns in the Rocks,  
April 14/36.

Dear Mr. Yeats,

I enclose a list of novels which you have probably read. You told me you had not studied Virginia Woolf. *Orlando* is a study of V. Sackville West. Virginia (in spite of her popularity) surely has genius? Am trying to get a photograph of the first Rothenstein portrait to send you. Keep well, here it snows and we are wretched. I have done the proofs of our book. It missed the Spring list it seems, bad luck. Have you David Cecil's Anthology of the old stuff? and the 3 new ones by Faber which I enclose for your amusement. I found some really interesting poems by Laura Riding in some new quarterly of which I cannot remember the name. Did you include any war poets in the end or not?

Yr. affecte. friend,  
D. W.

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PS. I see you had a visit from St. John Ervine, author of 'our peevish poets'.<sup>1</sup> Did he visit Graves and Riding also?

[Postmark  
April 20, 1936]

Casa Pastor,  
Sunday (no way here of finding  
out day & month).

Dear Lady Dorothy (I began my last letter 'Dear Dorothy' believing that I had your permission then came to the conclusion that my belief might be a delusion of my illness, & crossed out those words—yet I would like to begin 'Dear or My dear Dorothy.') You are right about Laura Riding. I had rejected her work in some moment of stupidity but when you praised her I re-read her in 'The Faber Book of Modern Verse' & delighted in her intricate intensity. I have written to her to apologise for my error & to ask leave to quote 'Lucrece and Nara', 'The Wind Suffers', 'The Flowering Urn'. She will refuse, as Graves has, but as a matter of honour I must ask. (This difficult work, which is being written everywhere now (a professor from Barcelona tells me they have it there) has the substance of philosophy & is a delight to the poet with his professional pattern; but it is not your road or mine, & ours is the main road, the road of naturalness & swiftness and we have thirty centuries upon our side. We alone can 'think like a wise man, yet express our selves like the common people'. These new men are goldsmiths working with a glass screwed into one eye, whereas we stride ahead of the crowd, its swordsmen, its jugglers, looking to right & left. 'To right and left' by which I mean that we need like Milton, Shakespere, Shelley, vast sentiments, generalizations supported by

<sup>1</sup> This refers to a series of articles in *The Observer*.—D. W.

tradition. (Hence your allusions to Heraclitus & his contemporaries, my toil at the *Upanishads*—just finished by the way—my use of legend.) We can learn from poets like ———, they purify diction, though they contort it, and see what we in our swift movement forget. Let us even imitate them, precisely because we cannot do so, swiftness & the lilt of songs in our blood. Being the crowd-scorned creatures we always murmur in the end

‘Let us sit upon the ground  
And tell sad stories of the death of kings.’

Do you not feel there the wide-open eyes?

Thank you for the list of books (I have two in Dublin, *Waves* & *Orlando*, but have only read *Waves*). I will not ask you to send any of the others because parcel post is very slow & the books might not reach me before May 26 when we leave. The posts are incredible except air-mail & that is only for letters. Post or no post they could not reach me in time for my introduction to the *Upanishads*, which I begin to-morrow. I have to hurry with it because when we leave for England the Swami returns to India. You will find the *Upanishads* wonderful things now that they are for the first time translated as poetry.

My doctor said to me yesterday ‘Your body is now normal’. I have still some detriments, I am weak from a long illness, & have drugs to take but I feel better than I have felt for years. I have a slip-shod Spanish doctor who says ‘I am not a mechanical doctor, I work by faith’. He said to me the other day ‘I am a bad doctor but I have done you more good than the good doctors did—’ he has very little English so heaven knows if he meant to say that, but the last part is true. He is an amusing man; I could always tell by his face when he thought I was going to die. I have no sense of age, no desire for

## *Letters*

rest, but then perhaps the French saying is true 'It is not a tragedy to grow old, the tragedy is not to grow old'.

Yours always,  
W. B. Yeats.

Penns in the Rocks,  
April 23rd, 1936.  
Shakespeare's birthday.

Dear Mr. Yeats,

May I call you 'My dear Yeats' as in the fashion of our forefathers. I like the style. No, you had no feverish illusion about 'Dorothy'. You were ill. I had signed my letter so. Thank you for a delightful letter. Are you coming first to England; to Penns? I contemplated making an attack on the ancient theme of love. Soon I became sentimental, and realised I was doing bad stuff, so threw off some ribald verses in higher spirits. They may amuse you for a few moments.

Am just off to London to furnish my little flat. It is in Turk's Row, the address sounds splendid doesn't it? But alas there are no drunken poets singing Broad-sides, but only fly-blown artists who think they are Keats or Velasquez as the case may be.

Yrs. always,  
Dorothy.

Casa Pastor,  
April 26 [1936].

My dear Dorothy (There, I make the plunge, you did give me leave. You did write that I might. I searched everywhere for your letter & as I could not find it thought I was dreaming. Then I remembered that in the first cloudy days of my illness I had burned all personal letters not knowing what the end would be).

I wrote to Laura Riding praising her work & asking

## *Letters*

for certain poems in Faber & Faber's Anthology. She replied full of amiability & offering the poems by Graves also but making conditions, must see introduction, must see list of contents, must not take any thing already in any other anthology. I have written very politely but pointing out that I am a despotic man & offering nothing. I have already over spent by about fifty pounds the five hundred pounds the Oxford Press set aside to pay authors. The fifty pounds must come out of my own pocket & that is almost empty.

I hope to leave here on May 26.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

Casa Pastor,

May 3 [1936].

My dear Dorothy: Yes, begin your letter 'My dear Yeats', I have a detestable Christian name.

I have made a few changes in your 'Songs for Street Corners', & with these changes they are I think delightful things. I read them out amid delighted laughter to an artist & her husband (she is doing my bust) & hated to part with them. My changes in No. 2 are mainly because 'innocent' seems dragged & because lines 5 & 6 belong to a different kind of writing, they are 'literary' & the writer of ballads must resemble Homer not Vergil. His metaphors must be such things as come to mind in the midst of speech (the pen confounds us with its sluggish deliberation). I altered two lines in No. 4. In line 3 I put 'bussed' instead of 'loved' to avoid the complicated profile involved by any discovery on her part that a mule lacks that cudgel, which a Roman author describes the gardener as taking from the garden god that he might beat some boys who were stealing apples. I have altered line 7 because 'did' in 'Suetonius did say' is impossible.

## *Letters*

Our words must seem to be inevitable. Apuleius describes a woman & donkey having connection in a crowded circus. I wish I knew what Suetonius wrote but I love your wayward verses. Keep the one general name & put numbers only to the sections—a name pins the butterfly.

I shall arrive about June 2 (I go by sea). I shall spend (say) a week in London to be examined by doctors. Then it would be a great joy if I could go to you. Could you have me for ten days or a fortnight? Is that too long? I shall be in Dublin for months I suppose, being looked after which I shall not like. Yesterday the doctor released me from all restrictions of diet except a general preference for little meat. (He has a way of saying of any diet he objects to 'it is not convenient'. He uses this word for everything. He surprised a woman patient by saying 'It will be convenient if you sleep with me for a couple of nights', he meant go to his Nursing Home.) He has told me to walk up hills, beginning with low hills & going slowly at first. He thinks I have been kept on the flat. I am full of mental activity & taking great joy in my play. I have delayed writing because Friday & Sunday are my letter writing days—this being part of my cure. I shall probably keep up the habit—it has restored to me my friends, & is a great rest. I long for quiet, long ago I used to find it at Coole. It was part of the genius of that house. Lady Gregory never rebelled like other Irish women I have known who consumed themselves & their friends; in spite of Scripture she put the new wine into the old bottles. Perhaps it was the New Testament that started the bad habit of breaking them. Till we went there Asia had all its old bottles—we should copy it & say with Henry Airbubble 'I am a member of the Church of England but not a Christian'.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

Letters

Penns in the Rocks,  
May 17/36.

My dear W. B.,

Is this better than Yeats? I am glad you like my 'Songs for Street Corner', trifles thrown down on paper. I am trying to find something better.

Forgive a scrawl. Ethel Smyth is descending on me at any moment. As I don't know her I am more than 'agitato', can you wonder? That is if you've read her recent book: *As Time went On*. It is good.

I am getting bored to death by personal relationships and feel I revert to type from both sides: Much solitude. Perhaps even eccentric.

'Come soon, soon.'

Yrs.,  
D.

PS. A new Shelley poem is found, a marvel. Keeping it to show you.

Casa Pastor,  
May 22 [1936].

My dear Dorothy,

I shall probably go to you as soon as you will have me, & my doctor has finished his examinations (if my wife still insists on these).

No I do not want other people unless you do. I want to see you & I am tired & we have much to talk over & to plan. You seem to under rate those 'street-corner' rhymes—I wrote to-day to Laura Riding, with whom I carry on a slight correspondence, that her school was too thoughtful, reasonable & truthful, that poets were good liars who never forgot that the Muses were women who liked the embrace of gay warty lads. I wonder if she knows that warts are considered by the Irish peasantry a sign of sexual power? Those little poems of yours are

## Letters

nonchalant, & nonchalance is declared by Castiglione essential to all true courtiers—so it is to warty lads & poets. After this wild week—not without its fineness—I long for your intellect & sanity. Hitherto I have never found these anywhere but at Coole.

I have asked Macmillan to send you my *Dramatis Personae*. Read the two series of extracts from my diaries; you will find that I wrote in 1909 all that I have said to you about Knowle & its like. Living in a disordered nation social order has become a passion, it is the country against the town. Why should we who, like most students of literature, ('all' a publisher once said to me) are country people, be intimidated by the critics who travel daily by tube & look at the electric signs. We want, not a new technique, but the old passion felt as new.

Yours affectionately,

W. B. Yeats.

My spelling & writing are worse than usual—fatigue, results of Barcelona. I enclose photographs of a fine bust of me by a local sculptor, Mary Klauder (Mrs. Jones in actual life) & of my self & Purohit Swami. We were waiting for the steamer to take him back to India.

[On his return from Spain Yeats came to stay at Penns for a few days. This accounts for the gap in the letters.]

Savile Club,

[June 22, 1936]

Monday.

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I have just rung up Cornish & asked him to send me that bound volume of Broad-sides—Sir William Rothenstein had it in his room & I want to show it to Dulac. I wish I could give it you, but it was sent me to show to



### *Letters*

people in London. I will send you [one] afterwards or get you one in Dublin when I get back there.

I have seen nobody but Turner who has been ill. That is why he has not written to you.

I add the chorus of my poem about the lady, the poet & the maid 'O my dear, O my dear'.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

Savile Club,

[June 25, 1936]

Wednesday.

My dear: I did not write you a letter of thanks, only a short note, there are things beyond thanks & instinct keeps one silent.

Belloc is sending the poem with music.<sup>1</sup> I have been going through Turner's last book with Turner, picking two lyrics for him to set. Belloc says he has published four songs with their music & never sold a single copy—curious, for he is well known. He has popularity but no personal following. It is the reverse with us.

I find the heat killing: last night I sat through most of the night in a chair as my heart-asthma was worse if I lay down.

I read my play to Dulac & Turner to-morrow, have a couple of old friends to see after that. I shall probably return to Dublin Monday.

Turner has asked me to condense a stray poem of his, that rends my heart

'But when a man is old, married & in despair  
Has slept with the bodies of many women;  
Then if he meet a woman whose loveliness  
Is young & yet troubled with power.

<sup>1</sup> 'Mrs. Rhys' reprinted in the 1937 Broad-sides.

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Terrible is the agony of an old man  
The agony of incommunicable power  
Holding its potency that is like a rocket  
that is full of stars.

Yrs affectly,  
W. B. Yeats.

This poem of Turner's I am detaching from vague rhetoric which he gives up without a struggle.<sup>1</sup>

Penns in the Rocks,  
June 24/36.

My dear,

I had your letter this morning saying the heat in London was 'killing'. Please get back to Ireland as quickly as possible. Here even the heat is great. Woke up with a start at 3 this morning, turned on the light and began to scribble verses, till the singing birds put me out of tune. I must now conquer the lyric, the song.

You lead me to fresh woods and pastures new. Turner's poem is very moving. But is it by Yeats or Turner?

Will write again almost at once.

Yr.  
D.

Savile Club,  
June 25 [1936].

My dear Dorothy,

Yes write to Dublin. If all goes well I shall be there Monday evening.

I am well again, had a good night's sleep.

Watt has got leave from Mrs. Kipling for 'St. Helena', 'Lullaby & the Looking Glass' instead of 'Deever'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Turner tells me that this was a complete misunderstanding by Yeats of his attitude. He did not ask Yeats to condense his poem; the suggestion came from Yeats and he acquiesced in his alterations for use in the Yeats anthology. When he reprinted this poem in his own *Selections* he made his own choice, as the reader may see.—D.W.

<sup>2</sup> For the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*.

## Letters

I enclose a letter from Sturge Moore which you need not return. He wants a review copy of your book. I think send him one, or get one sent to him. He will influence Ottoline & perhaps her circle.

I think much of the most beautiful of Chinese lanthorns, your face. I found some Irish story once of men who threshed by the light of a lock of hair, but that was a more mundane light.

Yours affly,  
W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
June 30 [1936]

My dear Dorothy,

On my arrival I was met by the various persons in *The Irish Times* photograph—some of the faces (Gogarty's, Higgins) may interest you as I have much of their work in 'The Anthology'. Dr. Hayes is the government director on the Abbey board. The fat man is Dr. Starkey, who most years spends a couple of months among gypsies in Spain, Austria etc., playing his fiddle & escaping among the gypsy women, according to one of his reviewers, with great difficulty 'a fate worse than death'. He was appointed by the previous government to conduct himself as Dr. Hayes does.

Last Sunday at 4.30 I was about to start from the Savile to see the Chinese Collection at 'South Kensington' when the porter told me that the museum closed at 5 on Sunday. I wondered if I could reach the Park, decided that I could not. A stalwart oldish man, who was standing by the gate into Grosvenor Square saw the desire in my eyes & said 'Mr. Yeats, would you like to go in?' He brought me in. He was Clifford Bax whom I last saw thirty years ago when he was a thin pale youth. . . . He & I & some friends of his sat under the trees for an hour.

## Letters

My sister the embroidress has a pleasant memory of Chesterton. She was staying there. He got very drunk one night. Next morning he did not appear at breakfast. Presently a servant came in to say 'Mr. Chesterton asks for a Bible and a tumbler of milk'. Mrs. Chesterton in unbroken gloom told the servant where the Bible could be found.

What did you think of the Belloc poem? It is not as good as I thought; I thought it was naiver, simpler. Shall I have it typed & sent to you? It is amusing but too deliberately so—too facetious. Perhaps on the whole I am for it; but it is your province not mine, for you are English editor.

I have seen nobody since I came back, except for that meeting on Kingstown pier—all yesterday I was hot, sleepy & lonely; sat in the garden; my daughter beat me at Croquet. The mallet seemed very heavy. My daughter strayed away with a magnifying glass looking for a slater to count its leggs—this because she is at present in love with an entomologist. To-day I am content with life again—my work has gone well & if the rain would leave off I am certain that the mallet would be light & that I could beat my daughter.

To-morrow I shall finish the play, then I write the ballad of lovers, the lady & the servant.

Yours with love & affection,  
W. B. Yeats.

Penns in the Rocks,  
July 4/36.

My dear W. B.

Thank you for your letters, and photograph of your reception on landing. I was much interested. I am glad you met Clifford Bax in Grosvenor Sq. and wish I had

## Letters

been there with you. At that moment I was in Canterbury sitting in amaze before the tomb of the Black Prince, who is now bright gold because he has been washed lately. Surely the most impressive tomb of its kind in England. I thought of and longed for you all the time. The crypt was built at about 500 by 'William the Englishman'. Small wonder that Eliot's play resounded well in Canterbury. They are having plays and music all the summer. But Eliot, that man isn't modern. He wrings the past dry and pours the juice down the throats of those who are either too busy, or too creative to read as much as he does. I believe that in time to come he will be regarded as an interesting symptom of a sick and melancholy age. He has written lovely things. I always ask myself however (being limited in learning) 'Is this or that cribbed from a Greek, an Indian, a Spaniard, anyone you like?' He is not perhaps influenced by the past, he being at pains to tell us so. The question is: *does he crib?* I enclose a long review with a long Introduction by him to the poems of Marianne Moore. I also enclose for your amusement the publisher's 'flapdoodle' (as I call it) of Edith Sitwell's Selected Poems. We poets must keep some inner serenity, or we shall all go mad.

I forget if you saw Gordon Bottomley's answer about 'The pride of Westmoreland'? He is pleased. It seems that a 'rousing carousing tune' was made for it years ago by a well-known musician and interpreter of Debussy, name Liebich. Bottomley adds that he would 'be all the happier if your brother Jack Yeats would do the drawings'.

As for the future will you my dear friend give your orders to your English Editor who is slightly bewildered, and entirely at sea about tunes.

I enclose a rough version (to-morrow) of my song, for your dream.

## Letters

You see I've come up democratic, and you will not approve.

With love and affection,  
D.

Riversdale,  
July 2nd, 1936.

My dear Dorothy,

I dictated to my wife a business letter which she wanted about *The Broad-sides*. This must have reached you some days ago. Here however is the emotional diary of my week. Saturday night sleepless; thought I fell asleep for only a few minutes. Dreamed I was in a great country house. Dorothy came to my room in the middle of the night. She was in some trouble about Dante, thought of turning Catholic. I was furious. Rest of the night tried vainly to sleep. Next morning finish my play. Triumphant; believe I have written a masterpiece. That night, sleeping draft, artificially quieted, good sleep. Next morning begin ballad about the poet the lady and the servant. Bad night. Next morning finish ballad in the rough. Triumphant; believe I have written a masterpiece. Twelve verses, six lines each. Will take a whole Broadside. That afternoon—despair. Reject my wife's suggestions for next *Cuala* book. Beg her to take over press. She explains that my name is necessary. I say I am incapable of facing practical life. Ill. Doctor told to hurry his visit. Good night. Then on Wednesday I finish ballad in the smooth and decide to do no serious work for some days. Good night and this morning perfectly well; capable of facing anything. What the devil is that doctor coming for?

There is an account which you will recognise from your own experience as a normal four or five days of the poetical life. To me you turn only the convex side of the

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work, and there is content and peace when I think about you.

I am longing to read your ballad. I will not send you mine until yours is finished.

Yours with love and affection,

W. B. Yeats.

PS. Just come.<sup>1</sup>

My dear,

Here you have a masterpiece. (I have just put in the rhymes, made it a ballad.)

I

She sent her maid unto the man  
That would her leman be  
'O Psyche mimic me at love  
With him I will not lie  
'Tis sweetly done, 'tis easy done  
So child make love for me'.

II

'Why will you never meet the dawn,  
Nor light the torch my child?'  
Said lover to the serving maid  
'Lie down, lie down you are wild,  
O you are wild for love of me  
And I with love am wild'.

III

The black death came or another death  
And took the lady and lord,

<sup>1</sup> D. W.'s ballad. D. W.'s own words are published in the *Cuala Broad-sides*, 1937, first incorrectly, with three final verses which were cut out because of W. B. Y.'s criticism, and then correctly on an erratum slip.—D.W.

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The serving maid, the sewing maid  
Sat down to hem the shroud.  
'O all goes well, O all goes well  
And I can sing it aloud'.

### IV

She that did what she was bid  
Sang to the feather stitch,  
'What of the man and the lady  
No matter which is which,  
All goes well with a man in the dark  
And well with the feather stitch'.

This is far better than my laboured livelier verses.  
This is complete, lovely, lucky, born out of itself, or born  
out of nothing. My blessing upon you and it.

Penns in the Rocks,  
July 6/36.

My dear W. B.

Owing to the arrival of that whirlwind my boy for his 21st birthday (he was moving from one camp to another somewhere) I did not copy out and send my song about your dream. Just as well perhaps, for I find it still humming in my ears, and that (with me at least) is a sign that I haven't done with it, or rather it hasn't done with me. Probably it's no good. To-morrow I have to go to London to have my eyes tested, having eyestrain. My oculist says I use them too much just because the sight is so good. This seems hard. Forgive therefore this scrawl. I had a charming letter from Virginia Woolf, saying that 'praise from Yeats is the only solid thing of its kind now existing'. She has been ill for months, and writes for the first time I have known a dispirited letter; she says she



### *Letters*

cannot write; but of course this will only be temporary. We must go together to see her when you are back. Of course when all is said and done poetry is the only stuff [except very little prose] worth writing, most especially now, and I think she, Virginia, knows it.

Yr. loving friend,  
D.

Riversdale,  
[July 10, 1936]  
Friday.

My dear Dorothy,

Here is another version of second & third stanzas. I start changing things because the rhyme of 'lord' & 'loud' etc. is not admissible in any prosody, then went on to the rest.

Yrs,  
W. B. Yeats.

'I go if that candle is lit'  
'Lie down, lie down you are wild'  
'O you are wild for love of me  
And I with love am wild'  
'I came to lie with a man in the dark'  
'Lie down again dear child'

or

But the black death took the lady & lord  
'I sew but what I am bid  
And all goes well O all goes well'  
But why does she sing so loud  
The serving maid, the sewing maid  
She that hems the shroud.

*Letters*

Penns in the Rocks,  
July 14.

My dear W. B.,

I send the revised version of the Ballad, and except for a minor change here or there I regard it as written. Have added lines to fit an air.

May I have yours now? I long to see it.

Loving  
D.

PS. I like my ballad; anyway for the moment.

Penns in the Rocks,  
July 18/36.

Dear W. B.,

I suppose it isn't possible at this stage to substitute one of the short poems from 'Deserted House' for the 'Thorn Tree'?

What you call my 'lucky eyes' are simply an instinctive observation of nature. This is scarcely represented in your selection. I know I have no right whatever to suggest this, but if it is not too late would you consider 'December Morning' or 'Midsummer Night' (from *Poems of Ten Years*) or the 'Forest in February' down to 'misbehave', instead of the 'Thorn Tree'? Of course I should insist on paying the cost of the correction. The 'Thorn Tree' is so painful and horrible that I do not want to give it this prominence for the sake of the boy's relations.

Affection from  
D.

Riversdale,  
[A] Tuesday [in July, 1936]  
I have added 'The Three Bushes', etc.

My dear Dorothy,

I send you what seems to me a better version of the

little poem. There is no reason why you should not write a separate poem on the Rose Bushes or rather put what you have written into ballad rhyme. Forgive me for my work on the present poem. I thought from what you wrote that you meant to leave it unrhymed & I wanted to prove you wrong. Perhaps it will go well with the 'Street Corner Songs'—it has their mood. I have recovered from the shock of your archaic modernity, which for a moment made me lose faith in myself. I now like my long Ballad of the Three Bushes again. I have written two other poems on the same theme. I will send all as soon as I can. I think them among my best things. Now that I have shut off external activity (the theatre board & 'The Academy' threaten to meet here but so far I waved them off) I live in excitement. A mass of new subjects (not now on sex) are crowding upon me. I waked tired after the imaginative feeling of some hour of the night. But I must not bore you with the concave of my mask.

I thank you for the ballad book<sup>1</sup> which I keep beside my bed & read at intervals of my morning's work.

Ottoline came here a few days ago for tea. She was a hen who had layed a very big white egg & wanted all the yard to know. The egg was our friendship, which was not only 'important' to me & you but to my wife (this when she got George to herself for a moment) for I would be safe in your hands 'You were no minx'.

Now that I have had all my Anthology in galley proof I am astonished at the greatness of much of the poetry, & at its sadness. Most of the 'moderns'—Auden, Spender, etc. seem thin beside the more sensuous work of the 'romantics'.

I am well—my blood pressure very low & my heart is

<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford Book of Ballads*, which I sent him.—D. W.

## *Letters*

well. I can now sleep lying flat but I am phisically but not mentally weak. At last I shall, I think, sing the heroic song I have longed for—perhaps my swan song.

Yours affectionately,

W. B. Yeats.

### Poem by Dorothy Wellesley<sup>1</sup>

#### I

She sent her sewing girl to the man  
That would her leman be  
'O Psyche mimic me at love  
With him I will not lie  
'Tis sweetly done, 'tis easy done  
So child make love for me.'

#### II

'I go, should you light a candle'  
'Lie down, lie down you are wild,  
O you are wild for love of me  
And I with love am wild'  
'I came to lie with a man in the dark'  
'Lie down again, dear child.'

#### III

But the black death took the lord & the lady  
'Who is singing so loud'  
'A sewing girl, a sewing girl  
That sings hemming a shroud  
'All goes well, O all goes well  
And all that I did she bid.'

<sup>1</sup> A second version, by W. B. Y.

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IV

High up lady, or sewing girl  
What does it matter which!  
Has found it sweet to lie in the dark  
Nor cared who made the match;  
O all goes well in the dark with a man  
And well with the feather stitch!

THE THREE BUSHES

(By W. B. Y.)

I

'Man's love that lacks its proper food  
None can rely upon  
And could you sing no more of love  
Your genius would be gone  
And could that happen what were you  
But a starving man'

*O my dear, O my dear.*

2

'Light no candles in your room'  
That lovely lady said  
'When twelve o'clock is sounding  
I shall creep into your bed  
But if I saw myself creep in  
I think I should drop dead'

*O my dear, O my dear.*

3

'I love a man in secret  
Dear chambermaid,' said she.  
'I know that I must drop down dead  
If he stop loving me,  
Yet what could I but drop down dead  
If I lost my chastity?'

*O my dear, O my dear.*

*Letters*

4

'So you must lie beside him  
And let him think me there  
Maybe we are all the same  
Where no candles are,  
Maybe we are all the same  
When the body's bare.'

*O my dear, O my dear.*

5

'No, not another song' said he  
'Because my lady came  
A year ago for the first time  
At midnight to my room  
And I must lie between the sheets  
the clock<sup>1</sup>

When bells<sup>1</sup> begin to boom'

*O my dear, O my dear.*

6

'A laughing, crying, sacred song  
A leching song' said they.  
Did ever man hear such a song?  
No not before that day.  
Did ever man ride such a race?  
Not till he rode away.

*O my dear, O my dear.*

7

But when his horse had put its hoof  
Into a rabbit hole,  
He dropped upon his head and died  
His lady that saw it all  
Dropped and died thereon for she  
Loved him with her soul.

*O my dear, O my dear.*

<sup>1</sup> These are alternative readings.—D. W.

*Letters*

8

The chambermaid lived on and took  
Their graves into her charge  
And there two bushes planted,  
That when they had grown large  
Seemed sprung from but a single root  
So did their roses merge.

*O my dear, O my dear.*

9

When she was old and dying  
The priest came where she was  
She made a full confession  
Long looked he in her face,  
And O he was a good man  
And understood her case.

*O my dear, O my dear.*

10

He bade them take and bury her  
Beside her lady's man  
And set a rose tree on her grave  
And now none living can  
When they have plucked a rose there  
Know where its roots began.

*O my dear, O my dear.*

THE LADY TO HER CHAMBERMAID

(By W. B. Y.)

I

What manner of man is coming  
To lie between your feet?

What matter we are but women;  
Wash, make your body sweet,

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I shall find a perfume  
To scatter on the sheet.

The Lord have mercy on us.

He shall love my soul as though  
Body were not at all

He shall love your body  
Untroubled by the soul

Love crams his two divisions  
Yet keeps his substance whole

The Lord have mercy on us.

Soul must learn a love that is  
Proper to my breast

Limbs a love in common  
With every noble beast

If soul may look and body touch  
Which is the more blest?

The Lord have mercy on us.

II

When you and my true lover meet  
And he plays tunes between your feet,

If you dare abuse the soul,  
Or think the body is the whole

I must, that am his daylight lady,  
Outrageously abuse the body;



*Letters*

Swear that he shall never stray  
From either neither night and day,

That I may hear, if we should kiss,  
That contrapuntal serpent hiss,

You, should hand explore a thigh,  
All the labouring heaven sigh.

Riversdale,  
[postmark  
July 18, 1936]  
Thursday.

My dear Dorothy,

You have got me down to fundamental rock. I cannot say the good is bad or the bad good, even though the good is by my bitterest enemy, the bad by my dearest friend. When I got your first sketch I went down stairs humming over the opening stanzas, getting the rhymes regular & said to somebody 'I have something here that will not die'. Yet what you send me is bad. What has the beginning to do with the end? 'With him I will not lie' can only mean (I thought it a masterly simplification) left unqualified that she is not in love with the man, that she does not want him at all. Why then should she in her talk with the briar lament that he was never hers. Why should this be 'truth after death'. Then why should the fact that she never gave herself cause the squire to lose not the lady but Psyche. Then in the last stanza I do not understand why Psyche has a living heart & why she can rise & deck their graves. Of course you know why, but it is not in the poem.

Then look through any old book of ballads & you will find that they have all perfectly regular rhyme schemes.

'O my dear, O my dear'

W. B. Y.

Perhaps your mind is meditative not narrative. I am

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putting your little poem with its music in one number with my ballad.

Penns in the Rocks,  
July.

My dear W. B.

I have this minute received your letter, slanging my 'ballad'. I take your points as they come.

1. Is it not obvious that the lady was a minx, a demi-vierge, an 'allumeuse', leading the young man on, letting him down? A mental baggage, a jade, hussy, slut, demirep, and so on?

2. *Argument.* So she left it to her maid, when it came to grips.

3. You say why then when the rose tells her the truth does she mind? Because she, like all the women described above, regrets what she never knew she wanted.

4. The squire of course minded. He had been cheated. (Psyche is merely a symbol.) And he lamented after death. It disturbed his sleep.

5. Why has Psyche a 'living heart'?

Because she loved the man and got what she wanted, and even the bitter truth after death could not destroy her memories. So she rose to deck all their graves.

6. Now as to technical errors about riming ballads. I hadn't attempted a true ballad. Had tried to graft a modern form upon the skeleton of the old. That is all. I don't believe in 'going back' in any sense, but this was an experiment. The modern mind cannot perhaps avoid short cuts, the assumption being that the reader has jumped to it.

I thought your verses very beautiful. Some I thought as fine as anything you have done. All yesterday I was in despair about the Muse.

Will you send back that false ballad? Just stick it into

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an envelope. I might rewrite it or not. There is something false in any case about archaic modernity.

Yrs. with affection,

D.

PS. Have you kept the first version of my 'ballad'? I destroyed mine. You called it a 'masterpiece' in your letter of that date, a fortnight or so ago. I was certainly astonished at your praise. Could I have that version back too?

Riversdale,

July 21st, 1936.

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I enclose your first draft, which does not differ much from the second. When I read it I think I only glanced at the end about the thorn tree. I thought that you had put it in because it was part of the story, and would as a matter of course leave it out. The first part surprised me, the new point of view and the absence of rhyme. Just as I thought you would leave out the end, so I was certain you either intended or could be persuaded to add rhyme. I ended the poem at 'Sang sewing maid to shroud'. In those first four verses I found something that had never been sung. The maid who had seemed 'wild with love' was able to 'sing aloud' as she hemmed the shroud 'All goes well, Oh all goes well, No matter who she be, All in the dark unto a man' (I read this to mean 'in the dark with a man'). She was gay. She was without grief. — said once to George Moore 'I wish I had a slave to do this for me. I would not have to think of him afterwards.' Your sewing maid gets the same result by being a slave—she had not to think of him afterwards. He was merely a man in the dark. In my excitement I began using my acquired skill to make your meaning plainer than you had made it. I sent you a first version with rhymes—I thought you would use it as quarry for

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rhyme. Then against my first intention I sent you what I thought a finished version.

Regular rhyme is needed in this kind of work. The swing of the sentence makes the reader expect it. 'Said lover to the serving maid', 'Tis sweetly done, 'tis easy done' and so on are ballad cadences, and then the six line stanzas suggest ballad stanzas. There is another reason. In narrative verse we want to concentrate the attention on the fact or the story, not on the form. The form must be present as something we all accept—'the fundamental sing-song'. I do not know a single example of good narrative where the rhyme scheme is varied.

I have left out the poem you have asked me to leave out, but I will write later about that and other things. I have begun my new long poem, and now I must get up. After lunch I have letters to dictate. I am in a great whirl of work and my working day is crushed into a short space. One letter is to the B.B.C. accepting their request that I should deliver the 'National Lecture' on poetry. They give me £100 which put my finances right, but my wife would not let me accept until I had read aloud with suitable expression for three quarters of an hour to judge of the strain. There was no strain, and I picked an average day when I was already tired by shouting for an hour at a deaf man.

Ah my dear how it added to my excitement when I re-made that poem of yours to know it was your poem. I re-made you and myself into a single being. We triumphed over each other and I thought of *The Turtle and the Phoenix*.

Yours,

W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,

July 26, 1936.

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I did not write because I have been busy mainly

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writing poetry. I get up every morning about 4, work at proof sheets until about 5.30, then go to bed again, breakfast at 7.30, and then write poetry, with interruption for rest, till 12. The rest of the day I try to do this or that but generally cannot. I remain sunk in indolence. Yesterday I finished my longer poem 'Lapis Lazuli'<sup>1</sup> and so to-day have come down full of energy having done nothing but my proof sheets in the small hours. Higgins came in last night and I showed him your poem, which he likes as much as I do. Turner has sent three poems of his own set by himself which my wife will send you in a couple of days together with a song by York Powell which I delight in. Would you care to go through the poems of Davies and see if there is anything that you think suitable?

The poem 'Lapis Lazuli' is almost the best I have made of recent years, I will send it when I can get it typed. To-morrow I write a story to be added to the Michael Robartes series (a prelude to *A Vision* which I am now revising in proof). It is almost an exact transcript from fact. I have for years been creating a group of strange disorderly people on whom Michael Robartes confers the wisdom of the east.

I have not put anything in place of 'The Thorn Tree'. I did my best, I went through your 'Selections' and your 'Poems of Ten Years' but found myself vacillating. I have an idea that I left out the nature poems because I wanted your poems to give an impression of rapidity. Rapidity is returning, it is no longer left to the popular poetry. I try to arrange the selections from each poet so that they will have unity of effect. I had great trouble with — who wanted a more 'representative' selection, even wrote to the publishers. I have changed my selection from Turner to increase its unity.

<sup>1</sup> See *Last Poems* (Macmillan).

## Letters

Can I come to you in October? They have fixed my broadcast for Oct. 11. If I cannot come then I will do it from Belfast. But Oh my dear, my dear.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

PS. Have *Selections* been reviewed?

Penns in the Rocks,  
July 26/36.

My dear W. B.

Of course come in October; let me know later a date etc. I have asked friends for week-ends that month, but you mustn't mind that. Rothenstein's son and daughter in law and the twin sister (lovely creatures) who sing and play such songs as we are collecting may be a help to us. You see my trouble is that I know no music, and must get help. Am so excited about your new poem, or poems, but will keep patience until you have time to send them. On August 10th I go to the Highlands to call on the Loch Ness Monster, and to get away from posts and walk the moors. I don't care about Scotland, no art, no stimulus for all its beauty, too barren of man's pilgrimage. Perhaps it is too beautiful. I crave like a lover for Italy. Letters from Ireland will be forwarded. Yesterday I spent a dark unhappy day reading Virginia Woolf and Edith Sitwell. What will posterity say? Both have genius. Anyway I felt they were far better at it than I, and went dejected to bed to sleep it off; hugging the thought that you had recognized my poetry before you knew me. Which poem of mine does Higgins like? Am depressed, and cannot write. One of the long desert periods I have always suffered from. *Selections* have been reviewed to the extent I enclose. The high-brow papers have (I can only suppose) through malice ignored me. Do not be alarmed, I have not fallen to persecution-mania, but this

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is marked. The *Manchester Guardian* (which review I have lost) scolds me for the 'sombre discomfort' of *Matrix*. This amuses me. I have immense admiration for Edith Sitwell's work. She reminds me at times of Edgar Allan Poe. I wonder if she knows about this kinship. . . .

She must be a superb character.

Don't overtire yourself. Writing at 4 a.m. is very exhausting. I know that from personal experience.

Yr. most loving friend

D.

PS. Don't return the reviews. They have no interest.

1st August, 1936.

TO D. W.<sup>1</sup>

Reach towards the moonless midnight of the trees  
As though that hand could reach to where they stand,  
As though they were but famous upholsteries  
Velvet under the touch; tighten that hand  
As though to draw them closer yet; rammed full  
Of that most sensuous silence of the night,  
For since you bought the horizon all is still,  
Climb to your chamber full of books and wait,  
No books upon the knees and no one there  
But some great dog that long had bayed the moon  
But now lies sunk in sleep.

What climbs the stair?

Nothing a common woman could ponder on  
If you are worth my hope; neither content  
Nor satisfied conscience, but that great family  
Some ancient famous authors misrepresent,  
The proud Furies each with her torch on high.

W. B. Y.

<sup>1</sup> This poem, with some important revisions, was printed in the *London Mercury*, March 1938 under the title 'To a Friend' and in the *Cuala Press* edition of *New Poems* 1938. It is published under the title 'To Dorothy Wellesley' in *Last Poems* (Macmillan) 1939.

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Riversdale.

Received August 2, 1936.

*Corrections in 'To D. W.'*

line 7 instead of 'all is still' read 'strange dogs are still'

line 10 instead of 'great' read 'old'

Will write on Saturday or Sunday.

W. B. Y.

Riversdale,

August 5 [1936].

My dear Dorothy: I began a letter to you on Saturday and began it with some new corrections in 'To D. W.' Then I changed my mind about the corrections and tore it up. I meant to write on Sunday but my wife offered to type my play if I would read out the MS. That took us Sunday and Monday and now I am free again. Here are my latest corrections in 'To D. W.'

Reach towards the moonless midnight of the trees,  
As though that hand could reach to where they stand,  
As though they were but famous upholsteries  
Velvet under the touch; tighten that hand  
As though to draw them closer yet etc.

Higgins says the poem is 'terrific' which I like as an adjective. He seems to like it best of all my recent poetry. . . . We have all something within ourselves to batter down and get our power from this fighting. I have never 'produced' a play in verse without showing the actors that the passion of the verse comes from the fact that the speakers are holding down violence or madness—'down Hysterica passio'. All depends on the completeness of the holding down, on the stirring of the beast underneath. Even my poem 'To D. W.' should give this impression. The moon, the moonless night, the dark velvet, the sensual silence, the silent room and the violent



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bright Furies. Without this conflict we have no passion only sentiment and thought.

My wife will send you the Turner poems and their setting and also a poem by Hugh MacDaerimid—there are so many ways of spelling that name—I would like to use,<sup>1</sup> partly because its subject, Noah and his beasts, would be a good theme for the artist. The poem of yours that Higgins liked is that which goes to music by Turner.

About the conflict in 'To D. W.', I did not plan it deliberately. That conflict is deep in my subconsciousness, perhaps in everybody's. I dream of clear water, perhaps two or three times (the moon of the poem), then come erotic dreams. Then for weeks perhaps I write poetry with sex for theme. Then comes the reversal—it came when I was young with some dream or some vision between waking and sleep with a flame in it. Then for weeks I get a symbolism like that in my Byzantium poem or in 'To D. W.' with flame for theme. All this may come from the chance that when I was a young man I was accustomed to a Kabalistic ceremony where there were two pillars, one symbolic of water and one of fire. The fire mark is  $\Delta$ , the water mark is  $\nabla$ , these are combined to make Solomon's seal  $\star$ . The water is sensation, peace, night, silence, indolence; the fire is passion, tension, day, music, energy.

Yours in love,  
W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
August 6th, 1936.

Dear Lady Dorothy,

This is a letter from George and W. B. Y. She has been so busy getting off galley proofs of the anthology that she has been unable to write. We enclose Turner's three poems with his music, we also send a York Powell, 'The

<sup>1</sup> For the Broadside.—D. W.

*Letters*

Pretty Maid' and 'Parley of Beasts' by M'Diarmid; we could probably get the music for the last two done here. If you agree to these poems please let us know as soon as possible and send them back so that we can give them to the artists.

Yours,

George Yeats.

W. B. Yeats.

PS. (by W. B. in his own hand) My lecture is on October 11th. I should probably be in London by (say) October 9th (Friday). May I come to you at the end of September? If so what day?

I think I have got the third line right at last:

'And they but famous old upholsteries' etc.

Penns in the Rocks,

Aug. 7/36.

My dear W. B.,

Yes your poem is very wonderful, and I like the corrections. 'Upholsteries' is much better than 'tapestries', and the whole superb. Yet I am so unhappy. That is why I have been silent about the poem. Too unhappy to be angry to-day and that is a bad sign. No doubt you will have seen the review in the *Irish Times* of Aug. 3 on the *Selections*. More insulting to you even than to me. The fool who wrote it apparently thinks that passion and detachment are incompatible. The reverse of your views in your letter of to-day about 'holding down violence or madness'. Also the fool (whoever he is) seems to think he knows more about poetry than Yeats. I am only astonished that he doesn't say so. I see I am getting angry, which is better. However I will not, like the Sitwells, defend myself, and perhaps it is good for the soul to pass unperceived on its pilgrimage.

I will write again before going away on Sunday. I take

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your precious letters and poem with me, and shall write from Scotland.

Yr. loving friend

D.

PS. So glad the proofs for the Oxford Book are well under weigh. It will all be very interesting, and cheer my intellectual spirit which is deep down somewhere.

Is it because I'm English perhaps; the review of the Dublin paper I mean?

Riversdale,

Thursday, August 13 [1936].

My dear Dorothy,

You should not bother about the *Irish Times* review; we have no critical press in this country. We have only hacks & amateurs. (One wrote to me a few weeks ago 'for months I have done the sports articles & now am being given a little literary work'—he wanted an interview.) The amateurs review without payment for the sake of the books which they sell. Latterly these amateurs have been what — called 'rackateers'—that is to say disciples of various radical schools—Auden, Day Lewis, etc. Here they are of no importance. But, my dear, you must be prepared for silly reviews until you are so old that you are beyond caring & then they will only take another form of silliness. For twenty years I never sent a book for review in Ireland knowing that any review here would be an attack. The more alive one is the more one is attacked.

I am in the middle of a commotion (partly press).

Write verse, my dear, go on writing, that is the only thing that matters. Beardsley said to me 'I make a blot & shove it about till something comes'. It is six in the morning. I have been at work for the last hour & a half & must now sleep.

H

## *Letters*

This is not the letter I meant to write, but this new excitement put everything but it only out of my head.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,

24th August 1936.

My dear Dorothy,

I want you to write to me about Turner's poems and music etc.<sup>1</sup> (We sent them in a registered packet to Penns in the Rocks.) The time has come when I must put the contents of half a dozen Broad­sides into the hands of the artists and the musician who copies out the music for the printer. I am hoping to have in those first six the two D. W. poems. I have in MSS. the York Powell, the Belloc, the Gordon Bottomley, the Auden poem (I have his leave, but am writing for proofs of his new book) or a second York Powell, or a Hugh MacDermot. I have the Irish poems complete and music for four of them. Higgins who is my link with musicians goes away for his annual holiday in a couple of weeks and I want the contents of four or five Broad­sides complete before that. Forgive my troubling you—you are probably going from house to house and hate the idea of writing a letter. I am myself full of energy, even of letter writing energy, having at last got leave till further notice to live on milk, grapes and peaches (both produced in great abundance by our garden this year). I am particularly happy. The Theatre has a Russian woman here for a time to improve the costumes and stage setting. Part of the bargain is to train her own successor. Having tried various art students and rejected them she has asked for my daughter, having seen her work. If all goes well my daughter will earn in her nineteenth year some £5 a week, which will enable her to quarrel

<sup>1</sup> This letter refers to plans for the new Broad­sides (1937).—D. W.

## Letters

with her family and take a flat of her own if she wants to. She is timid but draws with a bold sensitive line and is completely stage-struck.

O my dear, let me stay longer than a week. Can I not stay on for a little after my broadcast?

I have your life of Goldie<sup>1</sup> at my bedside and have re-read it all (except of course Stephen Gwynn's part which was not meant to be read). I like your clear prose, so lively, so well-bred, so vigorous. His poetry is better than I thought. Is the child poem addressed to you? There is poetical passion in the last verse. He could have been a poet had he cared. I envy him that intimate friendship, he could write so naturally, so engagingly. You shared so much. If this letter is dull blame him. I suddenly felt ashamed of my attempts to amuse and excite. My letters seem to me convulsive. I shall recover in time. His symptoms (page 134) are so descriptive of my bad days—days when clouds are low and the wind dead (much amended since I took to milk and peaches) that I became emulous. He had to stop to draw breath after a hundred yards. Could I do better. I went out and tried. Yes I could (with care). (Last night by the way Frank O'Connor told me that I looked better than I have looked for years. At last my nervous system is not overworked.)

I send you a review (which Purohit Swami has sent me). You may have seen it. They put you between Masefield and Edith Sitwell. *The Times of India* is far from London literary influence and I think sees you as you are seen by many accomplished minds.

Yours affectionately,

W. B. Yeats.

Send me back the Turner [poems] with I hope your approval. I must choose artists.

<sup>1</sup> *Sir George Goldie, Founder of Nigeria: a Memoir* by Dorothy Wellesey, with a historical Introduction by Stephen Gwynn (Macmillan).

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You will I think come into my broadcast (National Lecture as they call it). I have written about half, I am trembling on the brink of Elliot.

Penns in the Rocks,  
Sept. 3/36.

My dear W. B.

I'm very sorry to have worried you about Turner's poems. I thought there was no special hurry. I return them. The first: 'Men fade like rocks' is beautiful, do you agree? But perhaps too much akin to De la Mare's poems? All are good, but strangely unlike his other work. Are they the right sort of things for Broad-sides? I think Broad-sides should be vigorous, tragic, bawdy, wild, any of those things. Am I right? But not contemplative. As to the music, as you know I cannot judge. 'The Pretty Maid' by York Powell I like very much, but do not care much for 'Parley of Beasts' (H. MacDiarmuid) though this may be owing to the dialect. Just re-reading I do rather like it. You must decide. Forgive me my dear for my delay. I left here so tired that I set aside all work for 3 weeks, and had only one post forwarded. Now am snowed under. Poetry elbowed out as always now. I simply don't know what to do about this. No one here to run the estate, the house, the garden, the children's friends, (and *my friends* or those who think they are) except myself. I must find a secretary or perish. Have scarcely time to go out most days for more than half an hour.

My poetic life seems most days a dream. If I were a man, and had a wife to take practical life off my shoulders I might start the inner life again. Tired and depressed directly I get back, and almost chronic headache, my chief enemy. Pain knocks in my head yet I must go on.

I enclose a strange poem sent by Rothenstein. Is its

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fascination due to obscurity? I fancy it must be a fragment of some antiquity. Please return it if not wanted. Is there anything else I can do at once for Broadside? Mrs. Woodhouse has found a tune for the poem (*not ballad*) of mine which you did not like, 'Serving Maid'. Shall I send it? Ethel Smyth is much interested in your scheme, and is helping me. I shall welcome you on or about Oct. 1. But, stay as long as you like of course. De la Mare is coming to-morrow for the day.

Yr. loving

D.

PS. Am delighted that you like my Goldie book. He and you are the 2 great men I've known. You are right about his verse. He could have been a poet. Yes, the poem to a child was written to me. He understood the rebel. His Nigeria is now the model for all Africa.

Riversdale,

8th September 1936.

My dear Dorothy,

I am convalescent. The dire effects of a plate of duck made me take the law into my own hands. I refused everything but milk and fruit. Immediate improvement. Doctor had been sent for, prescribed digitalis (foxglove). Some days ago he congratulated me on my recovery. I said 'Diet'. He said 'Digitalis'. I said 'Diet'. He said 'O that helped'. Now I breathe like anybody else, sleep like anybody else, and walk about for the short time allowed like anybody else. My wife said 'I know what caused your relapse'. I said 'What?' She said 'The row at the Abbey'. I said 'Liver'. The question is, will this pleasant state continue now that digitalis is stopped, and I have been persuaded that the diet of the golden age may be kept in reserve to allow slight additions to my diet. . . . I was really ill up to about three weeks ago. My

young incautious doctor had made it plain that I might expect to be henceforth an invalid, living between bed and chair. Now he talks of complete recovery. He had all but forbid me to go to England or anywhere else. There is nothing wrong with me now but that I tire easily, that I am weak, (No my dear I will do my best not to upset your nerves), that I suppose I must go up and down stairs at a snail's pace and rather drive than walk. I mean that I no longer feel, look, or seem ill.

That ballad sent by Rothenstein does not come within our scope. All our poets are contemporary poets and all except York Powell are living. Turner's poems do. I do not want Broad-sides to be archaic. They contain such poems for unaccompanied singers which we want to hear sung. I plan quite deliberately that about one fourth should reflect the modern mind where most subtle, but I do not want a larger portion than one fourth. I send you a ballad of mine which I propose to put with Turner's 'Men fade like rocks'. It has an interesting history; about three weeks or a month ago a man, Henry Harrison, an old decrepit man, came to see me. As a young Oxford undergraduate fifty years ago he had joined Parnell's party and now had written a book to defend Parnell's memory. Mrs. O'Shea was a free woman when she met Parnell, O'Shea had been paid to leave her free, and if Parnell had been able to raise £20,000 would have let himself be divorced instead of Parnell. The Irish Catholic press had ignored his book. It preferred to think that the protestant had deceived the Catholic husband. He begged me to write something in verse or prose to convince all Parnellites that Parnell had nothing to be ashamed of in her love. The result is the enclosed poem, and an historical footnote which I reserve for my next book of essays. You will understand the first verse better if you remember that Parnell's most impassioned followers are now very old men.



*Letters*

I will write to you later about the music you offer to send. I want to see if I can not suggest a tune for your chambermaid ballad. Though I have never ceased working I had not until this recovery enough energy.

Yours affectionately,

W. B. Yeats.

[Enclosed Sept. 8th, 1936.]

COME STAND ABOUT ME PARNELLITES<sup>1</sup>

Come stand about me Parnellites;  
Come praise a hunted man;  
Stand upright on your legs awhile,  
Stand upright while you can,  
For soon we lie where he lies  
And he lies underground;  
Come fill up all those glasses  
And pass the bottle round.

And here's a cogent reason  
And I have many more,  
He fought the might of England  
And saved the Irish poor,  
Whatever good a farmer's got  
He brought it all to pass;  
And here's another reason  
Parnell loved a lass.

And here's a final reason  
He was of such a kind  
Every man that sings a song  
• Keeps him in his mind,  
For Parnell was a proud man,  
No prouder trod the ground,  
And a proud man's a lovely man,  
So pass the bottle round.

<sup>1</sup> Compare with revised version 'Come gather round me, Parnellites', printed in *Broadsides*, 1937, and *Last Poems* (Macmillan).—D. W.

## *Letters*

The Bishops and the Party  
That tragic history made,  
A husband who has sold his wife  
And after that betrayed;  
But a verdict on that history  
Is sung above the glass:  
Parnell loved his country  
And Parnell loved his lass.

(Signed) W. B. Y.

Riversdale,  
September 14th (perhaps) 1936.  
(probably 17th)

My dear Dorothy,

I have been a fool. I was so put out at not finding the rhyme which I thought and still think essential that I read with impatience and only half got your meaning. I rearranged the poem round that half meaning and thought it a masterpiece. Now I have read your poem patiently and get its whole meaning which I like even better. I send you the poem with my corrections.<sup>1</sup> I changed it as little as was compatible with putting in the rhymes which as I think the ear demands, and making your last stanza intelligible. Do, my dear, let me have it in this form for the Broad-sides. I think it will go with your music; it should if your musician has, like the old folk musicians, thought of stress only and left the rest to the singer. In reading the last line remember that the dead move in a whirl of wind in, I think, all folk lore. Whether it goes with your music or not, let me have it. When we meet we will decide upon the name of the fourteenth or fifteenth fabulist who made the original story.

I go to London at end of next week, and to you, if that will do, on October 2nd. I go for no object but to go

<sup>1</sup> This revised version by W. B. Y. follows this letter.—D. W.

*Letters*

to Penns in the Rocks, but will spend a few days in London first to see Dulac and Turner.

I am very well and have I think conquered the kitchen. I will send you details of my not very troublesome diet later. I am eating and drinking what I always wanted to eat and drink.

I must go at proof sheets of my 'Vision'.

Yours affectionately,

W. B. Yeats.

THE SQUIRE, THE DAME, AND THE  
SERVING MAID<sup>1</sup>

She sent her maid unto the man  
Who would her leman be;  
'O Psyche mimic me in love  
With him I will not lie.  
'Tis sweetly done, 'tis easy done;  
So child make love for me.'

And love she made until he said  
'With love for me you are wild,  
And I am wild for love of you  
And yet we were more wild  
Were we not hidden in the dark,  
So light the torches child.'

When they were dead of the Old Black Death,  
The Lord and Lady Proud,  
The sewing maid, the sewing maid,  
Sat down to hem the shroud,  
The serving maid, the serving maid  
Who did as she was bid.

<sup>1</sup> W. B. Y.'s re-writing of D. W.'s ballad.—D. W.

## *Letters*

Long she sang and loud she sang  
Sang to the feather stitch  
'All goes well with a man in the dark  
Whether he marry or letch;  
All goes well, O all goes well  
No matter which is which.'

When the Old Black Death came round again  
It was her turn to fall  
And she was put between their graves  
That each might on her call  
And soon was planted there a Thorn  
That arched above them all.

'I know,' said thorn to lady,  
But she spoke up in the grave  
'That he was never mine' she said,  
'Myself I never gave.'  
'Truth after death,' said the bitter bitter spine,  
'What we buy we have.'

'Then she was never mine' said he  
'Who rose before the morn.'  
''Twas all the same to him' said the maid.  
'That's so,' said thorn.  
'Truth after death' said the bitter bitter spine  
'That's so' said thorn.

'But when the withered leaf' said she  
'Cumbers all the ground,  
Before the morn I slip away  
And on their graves attend,  
If any find me brushing there  
I am but a whirl of wind.'

Letters

Riversdale,  
September 19th, 1936.

Dear Lady Gerald,

W. B. is quite well again; he is much better now than when he was staying with you last June. He *was* ill—in fact when I got your letter (about Broadsides) in which you asked for news of his health, he was rather ill. So I didn't write. At that time I was very doubtful if he would be able to get over to England.

He is now sleeping very well, has no breathlessness and his heart is excellent. The result, the doctor and *I* say, of digitalis; *he* says diet! I enclose a typed slip with diet. About 'rest'—very difficult to say. At present he lives in a routine: comes down at 3 p.m., goes for a drive or walk in his 'pram' or wanders about garden. Sees people and always rests after a couple of hours of talk. That is to say he is firmly left alone. But when he is away I don't believe he'll stay in bed until 3. So he probably ought to lie down or sit by himself for at least two hours between tea and dinner and one hour at least between lunch and tea. However, as Edmund Dulac said to me, 'He is the most obstinate man I have ever known'. I find the only way to make him rest is to plant him in a room by himself with a detective story and leave him sternly alone.

I am glad he can go to England now because I doubt very much if he will be able to go over again, at any rate unaccompanied. (This is of course private.) In any case he will have to 'stay put' from about October 20 to mid-April.

Yours,  
George Yeats.<sup>1</sup>

Savile Club,  
69 Brook Street, W.1,  
Oct. 1/36.

My dear Dorothy,

I am getting through my days contentedly—various

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Yeats.

## Letters

people, my club valet—a great student of my poetry—a shop where I buy shirts & others have congratulated me on my recovery. You too will find me completely recovered except I soon tire if I walk, or go much about which is natural. After my successful recovery a few weeks ago I was forbidden all exercise & so need practice. I understand that my wife has sent you a list of ideal rules for my conduct—Well—

I saw a good review of your work by Gibson in I think *The Observer*.

This afternoon I read my play to the actor who takes the chief part in Becket, to the producer & others at Edmund Dulac's.

To-morrow I give a dinner at the Ivy to bring Ethel Mannin & the Dulacs together. I shall drink my milk at home & divide an apple into four pieces, one for each course & hope that my abnormalities may escape notice.

I go to you Monday—trains are I suppose as usual & what that is I have forgotten. I will set the Hall Porter to the problem.<sup>1</sup>

Yrs.,  
W. B. Yeats.

Savile Club,  
Oct. 22 [1936.]

My dear Dorothy,

I have been confined to my room with bad cold since arrival—emerged yesterday quite well again. Am looking forward to going to you for Saturday & Monday next.

Yrs.,  
W. B. Yeats.

<sup>1</sup> Yeats came for a visit to Penns shortly after his arrival in England, returned to London for the broadcast of his National Lecture on Modern Poetry, and came back again to Penns.

Letters

Savile Club,  
[Oct. 29, 1936]  
Thursday.

Dear Lady Dorothy,

I return Tuesday next—Sunday evening go with the Dulacs to Macneice's translation of the *Agamemnon*.

O my dear I thank you for that spectacle of personified sunlight. I can never while I live forget your movement across the room just before I left, the movement made to draw attention to the boy in yourself. Also that so long must pass before we meet—at last an intimate understanding is possible.

I am busy at all kinds of things and am tired. I am very well. I have put off my return to Dublin because my wife thought Friday a bad day—an excursion—and Saturday seems little better & if I have to dress for the *Agamemnon* I should hate to pack on Sunday night.

I am enjoying my last idleness for a long time to come. The proofs of *Upanishads* & *A Vision* await me in Dublin, and an edition of all my work, with new preface and an introduction for America & of course the *Broadsides*.

Yours affectly  
W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
Nov. 8 [1936.]

My dear Dorothy: I am writing in bed, the coverlet strewn with proof-sheets of the *Upanishads*, on which I have spent the morning. In front of me, over the mantlepiece, is a large lithograph by Shannon, boys bathing, the most conspicuous boy drawn with voluptuous pleasure in back & flank, as always with Shannon. Under it a charcoal study by Burne Jones of sirens luring a ship to its doom, the sirens tall, unvoluptuous faint vague forms flitting here & there. On the other wall are drawings, paintings or photographs of paintings of friends & relatives, & three

## *Letters*

reproductions of pictures, Botticelli's 'Spring', Gustave Moreau's 'Women and Unicorns', Fragonard's 'Cup of Life', a beautiful young man and girl running with eager lips towards a cup held towards them by a winged form. The first & last sense, & the second mystery—the mystery that touches the genitals, a blurred touch through a curtain. To right & left are windows, one opening on to a walled garden full of fruit, one on a flower garden, a field & trees. When I came home I got the two shocks I always get—the smallness of my house, the bigness of my persian cat. I have a longing to tell these things because our last talk has created a greater intimacy.

There is no news—every afternoon since I returned has been spent answering letters, a month's accumulation, some from publishers requiring much thought. At this moment my wife is opening & arranging on my desk twenty-one believed to be about my broadcast.

Gogarty has come & gone shedding behind him an admirable 'Limerick'. Higgins who gave a vote I object to at an Academy meeting is I am told afraid to come. I shall invite him to dinner & make peace. The wind is howling in the trees & my windows tight shut against the draught.

Tell me if after serious thought you still want the Majorca bust of me & I will write to the sculptor & find what she wants for it.

Your friend, who feels so much more than friend,

W. B. Yeats.

Over my dressing table is a mirror in a slanting light where every morning I discover how old I am. 'O my dear, O my dear.'

Penns in the Rocks,  
Nov. 12/36.

My dear W. B.,

Forgive me, you will have my letter by now if not delayed by gales. I have been feeling ill, and now when



## Letters

longing for fresh air cannot get out. I thought that Penns and all its trees and its owner would be blown away last night.

I had a strange dream. You as your usual self and Hilda and I talking in a deep glade surrounded by tall straight full grown beech trees. You said: 'I can fell that tree with a pen knife'. I said: 'Then fell that one and prove it'. You walked up the slope of the glade. I could just see you making shallow cuts on the bark with your little knife. I heard Hilda call: 'Stand back, stand back'. 'No,' I replied, 'it will fall precisely where he wills'. It did. I knew this was magic, said to you: 'Will you do it again?' You did it again. I said: 'Three times it must be done for you are a magician'. You looked at me, I saw you were tired, begged you to sit down. The scene changed. Near the balcony of some small building above the glade a group of unknown people were waiting. I told them what you had done. You were sitting on a seat beside me. They replied they did not believe. Suddenly before me stood a small child. A little girl with long dark hair, a bright colour, a small pointed chin most marked and with eyes of luminous emerald. I turned to the group of people and said: 'This is the child of Yeats'. Fear crept on me, and I could feel that the people were afraid also. So to prevent fear gaining on me and on them I put out my hand and held that of the child, saying: 'You see she is *true*, she is *real* for I can touch her'. She vanished but a few yards off she reappeared, this time with a veil over her face. I went to her and said: 'Child, how did you come here?' There was no answer. Fearfully I lifted the veil. No face was there, the clothes were empty. I turned to the crowd and said: 'You see all I have told you is true'. They did not know the clothes were empty. Can you interpret this strange dream?

Love from yr. friend

Dorothy.

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Riversdale,  
Monday, November 9th, 1936.

My dear Dorothy,

After I had written to you I tried to find better words to explain what I meant by the touch from behind the curtain. This morning, this came.

Bird sighs for the air,  
Thought for I know not where,  
For the womb the seed sighs.  
Sinks the same rest  
On intellect, on nest,  
On straining thighs?

It is *Matrix* again but air not earth. In Fragonard's 'Cup of Life' the young man is not in his first youth, his face is lined with thought & that makes that picture too mysterious—a double thirst.

Yours,  
Yrs always,  
W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
[On envelope Nov. 12, 1936.]

My dear Dorothy,

I enclose photo of bust which please return. I have no other copy. The photo is from clay model. It is meant to be bronze.

W. B. Yeats.

Some friends hate the bust but I greatly like it.

You owe me a letter so I shall squander no more upon you.

Riversdale,  
Nov. 15 [1936].

My dear Dorothy,

Your dream is clear enough. I certainly have always felt that I am cutting trees down with a razor or trying to

### *Letters*

but it takes a dream to make it true. Then too that child;  
does not one always beget

Bird sighs for the air,  
Thought for I know not where  
For the womb the seed sighs—

Not from the bird but the thought. I have even heard that the child is the initiator—what was that strange child of Faust & Helen in the Second Part of Faust? Hilda was there because you associated her with me because of the B.B.C. work. One thing I cannot read is why you did not let the people know that the clothes were empty. Was it that they would have feared a spiritual existence or that there was some secret. Often in spiritual dreams there is something one cannot say—a deeper part of the dream is hidden from a more superficial part.

That poem that begins 'Bird sighs for the air' is now one of the poems attendant on 'The Three Bushes'. It is 'The Lovers Song'. I follow it with 'The Chamber Maid's prayer before Dawn' & 'The Chambermaid's song after his death'. Here they are

#### I

Whence came this ranger  
Now sunk into rest,  
Stranger with stranger,  
On my cold breast?  
What's left to sigh for  
Now all are the same?  
What would he die for  
Before night came?  
May God's love hide him  
Out of all harm,  
Now pleasure has made him  
Weak as a worm.

*Letters*

II

Joy laid him on my bed  
Weak as a worm,  
His rod, that rose up unfed,  
Limp as a worm.  
A shadow has gone to the dead  
Thin as a worm,  
Where can his spirit have fled  
Bare as a worm?

I am delighted that you too are attempting short lyrics 'though between coughes & sneezes'. I long to be there. Tell me how the 'reading in public' goes.

My love to you, & a somewhat lesser love to Hilda your Providence (is not every poet a drunken sailor?).

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

The bust is I think in the South of France. As soon as I get a moment to spare I will hunt it down.

I am describing *The Three Bushes* as 'founded upon an incident from the *Historia mei Temporis* of the Abbé Michel de Bourdeillie'.

Riversdale,

November 16, 1936.

My dear Dorothy,

This is a business letter dictated to George. The first *Broadside* appears in January, 'The Three Bushes' and your song. I have the poems and music for half a dozen more. It is most important to have a circular ready for my sister's sale which is on November 26 and 27th. There will be a certain number of copies sold only in bound volumes and these should contain a short introduction like that in the first series signed by Higgins and myself. Will you sign the new introduction with me, and may I put this

### *Letters*

in the circular? It need not be written for several months; it can be written by me and signed by both, written by you and signed by both, written by both and signed by both. We can get a hold of Turner and incorporate his musical learning and pretend it is our own.

Please send me a wire to say if you will consent to sign (autograph) it with me.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

I will write to-day or to-morrow.

Riversdale,

Nov. 20 [1936].

My dear Dorothy,

Here is a new poem. It is supposed to be spoken by the Lady before her two poems addressed to the Chambermaid.

I turn round  
Like a dumb beast in a show,  
I know not what I am  
Nor where I go  
And all my words are beaten  
Into one name  
Because I am in love  
And that's my shame;  
That which most hurts the soul  
My soul adores  
No better than a beast  
Upon all fours.

It is not in itself very good but it will heighten the drama.  
The poem I sent you two days ago should read

Joy left him upon my bed  
Weak as a worm,  
His rod & its butting head  
Limp as a worm.

*Letters*

A shadow has gone to the dead  
Thin as a worm,  
Where can his spirit have fled  
Bare as a worm.

I wrote the poem in this letter for the sake of the second line (wrongly expressed in the version I sent you two days ago, 'unfed' being clearly the reverse of true). I accept the suggestion and use it. Now I shall have nothing to do but poetry—& I shall send you many poems my dear.

You have never sent me the wire I asked for. Will you sign with me the preface to the new bound up Broad-sides?

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

I long to see the poems you promised.

Penns in the Rocks,  
Wednesday, Nov. 25.

My dear W. B.,

Am much amused about the worm-poem. Of course it struck me instantly, and I think therefore that Higgins is right. Otherwise there are lovely things my dear; but like all women I dislike worms. . . . Can you think of something to take the place of the worms? Worms we are and unto worms shall we return. I am quite unable to send you anything at present. Am writing faintly, when practical life leaves me alone. That is not the right life for a poet. The reading went quite well I am told, but I caught another chill. If only you lived here, or I in Ireland, we could meet happily over week-ends. That ballad I am attempting to revise, but it seems to lose something, the rimes fall rather too easily. Have no wits this afternoon which is cold and damp beyond description. I long for the South. Long white roads, little inns with coloured wines, and lovely paintings in their settings in every little brown town crowning the hills. Are you get-

## Letters

ting the half-wit reviews of the Oxford Book? If not I will send them on. Have decided that journalists have lost any wits they ever had, and that wasn't much as we know by the past.

Yrs. with love,  
D.

Riversdale,  
Nov. 28 [1936].

My dear Dorothy: Yesterday was a most eventful day. I finished my last proof sheet (*Vision & Upanishads* galleys both done); my daughter came in, have learned that she is to be paid a pound a week for six months & then get a rise; the Abbey announces that they will play 'The Herne's Egg' in early spring—there will be uproar; & I sent off a ferocious ballad written to a popular tune, to a newspaper. It is on 'The Forged Diaries of Roger Casement' a book published here, & denounces by name — and — for their share in abetting the forgeries. I shall not be happy until I hear that it is sung by Irish undergraduates at Oxford. I wrote to the editor saying I had not hitherto sent him a poem because almost [all] my poems were unsuitable because they came out of rage or lust. I heard my ballad sung last night. It is a stirring thing.

I have changed the adjective in the worm poem

Whence came this ranger  
Sunk into rest  
Stranger with stranger  
On my cold breast?  
May God's love hide him  
Out of all harm  
When pleasure has made him  
Dull as a worm.

*Letters*

When pleasure has made him  
Dull as a worm.

And then 'the summing up'

From pleasure of the bed  
Dull as a worm  
His rod & its butting head  
Limp as a worm  
A shadow among the dew  
Thin as a worm  
His spirit that has fled  
Bare as a worm.

The 'worm' is right, its repulsiveness is right—so are the adjectives—'dull', 'limp', 'thin', 'bare', all suggested by the naked body of the man, & taken with the worm by that body abject & helpless. All suggest her detachment, her 'cold breast', her motherlike prayer.

My dear, my dear—when you crossed the room with that boyish movement, it was no man who looked at you, it was the woman in me. It seems that I can make a woman express herself as never before. I have looked out of her eyes. I have shared her desire.

The Anthology which is being hurriedly reprinted is having an immense sale.

Now that I am free from proof sheets I shall take the bus to town & begin my usual life. I shall begin by going round the picture galleries—there is a new Gainsborough in one.

Yours with love & affection,  
W. B. Yeats.

You will not find the four line stanza 'too easy' if you struggle to make your spirit at once natural & imaginative. My 'Casement' is better written than my 'Parnell' be-



## Letters

cause I passed things when I had to find three rhymes & did not pass when I had to find two.

Penns in the Rocks,  
Dec. 1/36.

My dear W. B.,

Please please don't insist on this savage attack on — at Oxford. Let us find out the facts first. If you were God Almighty I would say the same to you.

Yr.,  
D.

Riversdale,  
Dec. 4 [1936].

My dear Dorothy,

I could not stop that ballad if I would, people have copies, & I don't want to. — belongs to a type of man for whom I have no respect. Such men have no moral sense. They are painted cardboard manipulated by intrigueurs. If he had been a man he would before circulating those charges against Casement have asked 'was the evidence shown to Casement?' & have learned that Casement denied the charges & asked in vain to be shown the evidence. I was present when the Editor of *The Times* spoke of making the same charges in *The Times*. He did not do so, probably because of the infuriated comment of Roger Fry & myself. It was impossible to talk for five minutes to Roger Fry without finding out that he was honest. However I hate 'Leagues of Nations' & Leagues of all kinds & am not likely to be just.

[A discussion of the well-known Casement charge follows.]

But the Casement evidence was not true as we know—it was one of a number of acts of forgery committed at that time. I can only repeat words spoken to me by the old

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head of the Fenians years ago. 'There are things a man must not do even to save a nation.'

By the by my ballad should begin

'I say that Roger Casement  
Did what he had to do  
But died upon the scaffold,  
But that is nothing new.'

I feel that one's verse must be as direct & natural as spoken words. The opening I sent you was not quite natural.

No I shall not get the ballad sung in Oxford: that was but a 'passing' thought because I happen to know a certain wild student who would have been made quite happy by the task—the idea amused me.

We will have no great popular literature until we get rid of the moral sycophants. Montaigne says that a prince must sometimes commit a crime to save his people, but if he does so he must mourn all his life. I only hate the men who do not mourn.

Forgive all this my dear but I have told you that my poetry all comes from rage or lust.

Yrs affly

W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
[Dec. 7, 1936]  
Monday.

My dear Dorothy,

I am upset & full of remorse. You were quite right. I have wronged —, though not —. I got in a blind rage & only half read the passage that excited it. . . . All my life I have been subject to these fits of rage though thank God seldom if ever about any matter that effects myself. In this case I lost the book & trusted to memory. I am full of shame.

## Letters

Please tell Hilda Matheson, I may have sent her a copy.  
I am not sure.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

Please burn that letter or black out that mention of —.

Riversdale,

Dec. 9 [1936].

My dear Dorothy,

Here is my final apology

You think it horrible that Lust and Rage

Should dance attendance upon my old age.

They were not such a plague when I was young.

What else have I to spur me into song?

The Abbey Theatre has decided not to do my new play. I am greatly relieved. I am no longer fit for riots, & I thought a bad riot almost certain. The situation here is affected by the Civil War in Spain. A movement called *The Christian Front* is gathering all the bigots together. We have all been threatened with what can only mean mob violence by a Catholic preacher. 'Those responsible' ran one sentence 'for the outraging of Nuns in Spain are all the intellectuals since the Rennascence who have opposed the supernatural' & then came sentences, which are supposed to refer to The Irish Academy of Letters and to myself. We were told we were watched & that the Catholics of Ireland would not be always patient. Some of the results of the frenzy are exhilarating. . . . It almost competes as a topic with an outbreak among the young in favour of the king, which has astonished everybody. For the first time in the history of Ireland they are loyal. I wonder if anything of the kind is happening elsewhere. I imagine that the old anti-English feeling has now concentrated on Baldwin.

The Oxford University Press has congratulated me on my 'courage' in stirring up 'such a hornet's nest' & offers

## *Letters*

me a further advance on royalties. Most of my critics are very vindictive, a sure sign that I have some where got down to reality.

O my dear, O my dear do write. I feel I am in such disgrace. Do burn that letter about——

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,

Dec. 10 [1936].

My dear Dorothy,

This post brings me a letter from an Irishwoman in England to whom I had sent the corrected Casement poem, she writes approving of what she supposes to be my hatred of England. It has shocked me for it has made me fear that you think the same. I have written to my correspondent. 'How can I hate England, owing what I do to Shakespeare, Blake & Morris. England is the only country I cannot hate.' She is an extreme revolutionist but writes 'I drank the toast of the king for the first time in my life the other day'.

Do let me have your new ballad of the lady, lover & chambermaid. I have greatly improved mine. It is now with the illustrator.

I have just started a scheme for periodical gatherings to sing & hear modern Irish poetry sung.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

I am out of note paper. My correspondent is very sad at having to cut out ——'s name, she 'hates him'. I have noticed that mild men turn hottest blood to vinegar.

Penns in the Rocks,

Dec. 20/36.

My dear W. B.,

Of course I do not think you 'hate England'. I do not

### Letters

suppose you would be friends with me if you did? I (unlike you) hate hate, and love love, and think there is some racial difference here. Now, if hatred grows as it seems to be doing all European culture may be destroyed, and all of us reduced to brutes. Therefore I believe that love is constructive and hate destructive; I not only *believe* it, but see and observe it. Let us talk no more of your ballad of hate. Am snowed under by Xmas, and the boy rather ill with 'flu', so forgive a dull letter.

Yr. devoted friend,

D.

PS. May I see the other ballad? You only sent a few lines.

Riversdale,

Dec. 21 [1936].

My dear Dorothy: My wife has heard from the maker of the bust. She is in New York (expropriated from Majorca) & asks leave to exhibit it there in February. We have asked her after that to send it to London. We should do that in any case as it will need negotiation with the Irish government to escape a heavy duty. It can be sent to you for inspection. But all that can wait.

Gogarty once described the wit & phantasy of a friend of his called Tancred (who was he declared a descendant of the Crusader of that name). I knew him once, he had just been received into the Catholic Church. The ceremony over, some priest asked what had led him to the truth & Tancred said 'I was in the Brompton Oratory & I saw on a tablet "Pray for the soul of Elinor de Vaux" & I thought the name so beautiful that I wanted to gain the priviledge of praying for her'.

Turner writes to me 'They will some day be grateful for your discovery of Lady Dorothy'. A very strange man would have liked to do so ten years ago. Did you see in

## *Letters*

the papers about two years ago that a writer wrote a book which he meant 'as a serious work of art' but which was alleged to contain obscene passages. He sent it to a publisher—the publisher reported him to the police & he got six months. He had no talent but his case made some stir, & there was much indignation against the publisher. That man, I have just heard, had a cult of royalty—& had selected you—whom he imagined probably as somewhere near the throne—for boundless admiration—I cannot remember his name.

I thought the ex-king's broadcast moving, restrained & dignified & of what I hear the Archbishop's was the reverse.

My Anthology continues to sell & the critics get more & more angry. When I excluded Wilfred Owen, whom I consider unworthy of the poets' corner of a country newspaper, I did not know I was excluding a revered sandwich-board Man of the revolution & that some body has put his worst & most famous poem in a glass-case in the British Museum—however if I had known it I would have excluded him just the same. He is all blood, dirt & sucked sugar stick (look at the selection in Faber's Anthology—he calls poets 'bards', a girl a 'maid' & talks about 'Titanic wars'). There is every excuse for him but none for those who like him.

I had a black fortnight the result of nervous strain writing the Casement poem you have seen & another that you have not—beating the paste-board men—& some other odds & ends. I got sleepy & tired & spent my day in bed & thought of my soul. Then I noticed that every time I thought of my soul I used some second-hand phrase & knew by that that I was thinking of my soul from ambition & vanity. I said to myself 'Your job is to avoid deep places & to die blaspheming' & I got well at once, went to the theatre at night & by day took the bus to Dublin.

## Letters

The B.B.C. have asked me to rehearse one of the programmes I suggest early in March. Will I find you then?

What makes your work so good is the masculine element allied to much feminine charm—your lines have the magnificent swing of your boyish body. I wish I could be a girl of nineteen for certain hours that I might feel it even more acutely. But O my dear do force yourself to write, it should become as natural to you as the movement of your limbs. When I cannot do anything else I take up some old fragment & try to add to it & perfect it—there are always so many fragments—I have just turned out a thing of joy, just such a fragment. Once more I am starting on another.

Yours with all affection,

W. B. Yeats.

Have you noticed that the Greek androgynous statue is always the woman in man, never the man in woman? It was made for men who loved men first.

Riversdale,

Dec. 23 [1936].

My dear Dorothy,

Do not reply to ——. There is a saying 'never reply to a reviewer unless to correct an error of fact'. If you reply you choose a jury that is packed against you, & the editor will cut down your letters, or stop them altogether if you seem likely to score off his paper. And very seldom correct even a matter of fact. The paper in which ———'s article appears is communist.<sup>1</sup> You have no friends there. —'s article is illbred & dishonest. He is not himself illbred, but men of his kind when they take to proletarian politics copy the worst manners of the mob. I return the article & suggest that you read the poem of Wilfred Owen's, which he quotes with so much admiration. I cannot imagine anything more clumsy, more dis-

<sup>1</sup> *The Daily Worker*, which had an attack on 'Horses'.—D. W.

## *Letters*

cordant. One reason why these propagandists hate us is that we have ease & power. Your tum-ta-ti-tum is merely the dance music of the ages. They crawl and roll and wallow. You say that we must not hate. You are right, but we may, & sometimes must be indignant & speak it. Hate is a kind of 'passive suffering' but indignation is a kind of joy. 'When I am told that somebody is my brother protestant,' said Swift, 'I remember that the rat is a fellow creature'; that seems to me a joyous saying. We that are joyous need not be afraid to denounce. A Dutch mystic has said 'I must rejoyce, I must rejoyce without ceasing, though the whole world shudder at my joy'. Joy is the salvation of the soul. You say we must love, yes but love is not pity. It does not desire to change its object. It is a form of the eternal contemplation of what is. When I take a woman in my arms I do not want to change her. If I saw her in rags I would get her better clothes that I might resume my contemplation. But these communists put their heads in the rags & smother.

I will send that ballad but will not be able to do so for a few days. My last typed copies went off to America on Monday & it is always difficult to get a typist here who can read my writing or take my dictation. Then you may as well have the two Casement ballads together, they are meant to support each other. I am fighting in those ballads for what I have been fighting all my life, it is our Irish fight though it has nothing to do with this or that country. Bernard Shaw fights with the same object. When somebody talks of justice, who knows that justice is accompanied by secret forgery, when an archbishop wants a man to go to the communion table, when that man says he is not spiritually fit, then we remember our age old quarrel against gold-brayed and ermine & that our ancestor Swift has gone where 'fierce indignation can lacerate his heart no more', & we go stark, staring mad.



## *Letters*

I said when I started my movement in my 25th or 26th year 'I am going to stiffen the back-bone'. Bernard Shaw may have said the same in his youth; it has been stiffened in Ireland with results. I am an old man now & month by month my capacity & energy must slip away, so what is the use of saying that both in England & Ireland I want to stiffen the back bone of the high hearted and high-minded & the sweet hearted & sweet-minded, so that they may no longer shrink & hedge, when they face rag merchants like ——. Indeed before all I want to strengthen myself. It is not our business to reply to this & that, but to set up our love and indignation against their pity & hate—but how I run on—Forgive me.

Yrs always,

W. B. Yeats.

I do not know what Clifford Bax meant by saying that I had not made the anthology myself.<sup>1</sup> You chose those two Kipling poems, my wife made the selections from my own work. All the rest I did.

Riversdale,

[Received Jan. 1, 1937]

Wednesday.

My dear Dorothy: I have been ill—not my special complaint but exhaustion (overwork, mental strain). Here are the causes

1

Casement forgeries (rage that men of honour should do such things).

2

Catholic threats against self & friends.

Attacks on Anthology (Feeling that I have no nation, that somebody has bitten my apple all round).

<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse.*

*Letters*

3

People who have taken my advice, or example, as if it were a drink of raw whisky (remorse).

4

The present state of Europe. (Europe is in the waning Moon, are all those things that we love waning?)

5

Attempt to find a poetical emotion  
To dissolve these passions.

I have been in bed unable to do anything but sleep, yesterday I got up for the first time. I made this poem out of a prose translation of a Japanese Hokku in praise of Spring.

A most astonishing thing,  
Seventy years have I lived,  
(Hurrah for the flowers of Spring,  
Spring is here again)  
Seventy years have I lived  
No famished beggar man,  
Seventy years, man & boy,  
Seventy years have I lived  
And never have I danced for joy.

To-day I am better but still somewhat tired. My emotional crisis has given me a theme for one of my more considerable poems, in the metre of *Sailing to Byzantium* but I must not attempt it until quite recovered. — has transferred his fury to me (you may have seen him in *Time & Tide*) direct falsehood & suggestion of falsehood, but no education, no culture gives a man good taste—except in superficial things—if the nursery was wrong. Recent attacks have concentrated on my putting in you & Gogarty—the last because he sings a brave song & so makes a whinging propaganda look ridiculous. You because you are a woman of rank (their hatred is, to use a

## *Letters*

phrase of Balfour's intemperate youth, 'a fermentation of their desire to lick your boots') & because I have left out Wilfred Owen who seems to me a bad poet though a good letter writer. One American fury mentions neither you nor Owen but denounces Gogarty & Wilfred Blunt (Wilfred Blunt did several anti-pacifist things including Bull-fighting). Meanwhile the book continues to sell. — has sent in a review so envenomed that the editor has refused to publish it. Turner has said that 'an intellectual is a man who has discovered how to have ideas without intellect'. However let us be consoled—

Wine comes in at the mouth  
And love comes in at the eye—

I have found, being no intellectual, that even in old age eye & mouth are still there.

My son has gone to the customs to get your registered packet for which I will thank you on his return.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

PS. My son has returned with your gift. I thank you for those charming things which I have placed beside my blue mountain, where the Chinese musicians climb to the little guest house or temple. I think the locket may be a luck charm, and certainly this morning I am perfectly well & have still another subject for poetry.

Last night Higgins came in. O'Connor & he are in a rage. — has sneered at Irish poets as men who have been in jail or who have risked their lives gun in hand while he the sham revolutionist has no intention of doing either. I understand that O'Connor & Higgins are about to denounce him in the most violent language in the labour press. The Irish revolutionist does not understand pacifism. The men who came to Ireland during the great war to escape military service were called 'freeze

## *Letters*

bottoms', a word so unintelligible that it is very abusive.

I have just had a letter from an enraged English school-master denouncing me for saying nothing in my introduction about Rupert Brooke who is 'the truest and, if he had lived, unquestionably would have been the finest poet ever produced by England'. He then complains that 'towards the end' I find room for 'some of the most senseless twaddle he has ever read'. This is of course Auden, Day Lewis, etc. He writes from a preparatory school in Shrewsbury. Another of to-day's batch calls them 'very peculiar'.

It is pleasant to know that poetry can raise such frenzies.

Penns in the Rocks,  
Dec. 25, Xmas/36.

My dear W. B.,

I am sorry to know you have been in bed, and so much bad temper to cope with. Still all comes well in your last sentence. 'It is pleasant to know that poetry can raise such frenzies.' I enclose Turner's answer to — to amuse you. Don't bother to return it. I too have been far from well, sleepless and generally upset by tiresome events, beset by strange dreams. Last night I dreamt of Shelley, and Byron's child Allegra, and woke calling: 'Shelley Shelley, save the child, oh save the child' as indeed he tried to do. But this is explained, for both my own children have had flu. The boy badly. He yearns for the North West Frontier and the gallantries of his dreams. But as you say: Europe seems to be under a waning moon. Oh, if I were a young man, and not a woman in the forties with small strength. Here we have no leader. Perhaps the end has come, as to Rome. I began a poem before Xmas, was overwhelmed by Xmas, I hope however to finish it—when I am quiet. All these events make it difficult to keep well. News grows worse, 20 years ago

## *Letters*

we should have been at each other's throats by now!  
Cannot bear to think of the dignities and beauties of  
Spain, of all her pride. Here in England people talk of  
nothing else, all this makes one's own job so hard.

Yr. affecte. friend,  
Dorothy.

Riversdale,  
Jan. 8/37.

My dear Dorothy,

Your son's instincts are probably right. Henley said to me once that a young man may seem weak when all he is doing is 'trying the strength of the forces' & Tagore in his autobiography says much the same of himself. Your son wants a framework of action much as a man who feels that his poetry is vague & loose will take to writing sonnets.

That Shelley dream shows how deeply Shelley has got into your sub-conscious nature, but probably it was your own children you saw in the dream-mirror. Are not dreams like our poetry—one life in terms of another life? At this moment I am expressing my rage against the intellegentsia by writing about Oliver Cromwell who was the Lennin of his day—I speak through the mouth of some wandering peasant poet in Ireland.

I find wherever I go; and far & wide I must go  
Nothing but Cromwell's house & Cromwell's murderous  
crew!

The lovers & the dancers are beaten into the clay;  
And the tall men & the swordsmen & the horsemen  
where are they?

And I without a master wander far and wide  
My fathers served their fathers before Christ was cruse-  
fied.

## Letters

I send a new *English Review* with a most important article. You must return it for I shall want it when the time comes to reply. It makes it quite plain that you and I are attacked because the greater part of the English intelligentsia are communists. I shall take the challenge but not now. I am much too happy writing ballads & getting them set to music & arranging to get them sung. I have done two this week which are among the best poems I have written & am in the middle of the one I quote.

Hilda Matheson writes that you are going into a nursing home in March, as you calculate that by that time you will be worn out. I shall probably arrive on March 1 (to rehearse B.B.C. poems) ring you up & find that you have just left for the nursing home.

I wonder if my letters bore you—I seem to have made you my confessor—especially when I was in that black mood, but I am gay now—& writing for sad piping.

That girl is dancing there, there  
Alone on the leaf-sown, smooth  
Worn pathways of the garden,  
Escaped out of bitter youth,  
Escaped out of her crowd,  
Out of her black cloud

Ah dancer, ah sweet dancer.

If strange men come from the house  
To lead her away, do not say  
That she is happy being crazy,  
Lead them gently astray,  
Let her finish her dance,  
Let her finish her dance.

Ah dancer, ah sweet dancer.

Yrs always,  
W. B. Yeats.

## *Letters*

The article I chiefly want you to read is on page 252 but that by E. H. Norman on the late King is also worth reading.

Riversdale,  
[On envelope, Jan. 21, 1937]  
Thursday.

My dear Dorothy,

I am down with flu—not bad but just enough to make me postpone letter writing.

My first broadcast of poems sung & recited will go out from Athlone on Feb. 1 8.15 to 8.30. You will not listen because you will be at dinner unless you have a very strong reason. If you have any body from the Foreign Office or its neighbourhood to dinner postpone dinner & both listen in & watch results. The last item is my Casement poem. The Foreign Office has forgotten its crimes.

I have had to leave rehearsal to Frank Higgins.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

The songs are sung on the Abbey stage without the patter I have written for the chief actors, and my only comic song may amuse you.

Penns in the Rocks,  
[Jan. 27] /37.

Forgive me my dear W. B. for letting a week pass without answering your last letter. I have no excuse whatever, except for the usual troubles of flu throughout the family. England is laid low. Be careful not to catch it; it is very infectious this year. Your verses on Cromwell please me enormously. But how curious an echo from Chesterton? It sounds splendid stuff, have you any more of it? When you attack Cromwell these modern times I remember there is no character in history I dislike so much. But who is Cromwell now?

### Letters

But who is Cromwell now my dear  
And where are Oliver's bones  
They scattered them at Michaelmass  
They tore them from the stones,  
They struck his most disgruntled head,  
That none could recognise,  
Upon a pike on London Bridge  
His hollows were his eyes.  
Hurrah, hurrah,  
His hollows were his eyes.

However I return: Who is Cromwell? I see small difference between Communism and Fascism, both being tyrannical. On the whole Hitler a better human being perhaps than Mussolini. Here we think of nothing else; I try to bar politics in this house. No I do not care for your poem *Sweet Dancer*. You will find London a hideous fever in May or June. Why not put off your visit? All will be a mixture of dignity and vulgarity, and I shall be obliged for Elizabeth's sake to attend functions. The mere prospect destroys me.

Meanwhile I am working on the mass of fragments I have thrown off for a year. I feel you far away to-day, I wonder why? The man who wrote the article in the *English Review* says that Shelley only *touched great poetry* in the 3rd part of Peter Bell. Have the intelligent [*sic*] become crazy with conceit? Peter Bell is almost entirely rubbish. Shelley grew up late, and had just touched and found his genius when he died.

Yr. loving friend,  
Dorothy.

Riversdale.

[On envelope, Jan. 28, 1937.]

My dear Dorothy,

I perfectly understand that you dont want me until



## Letters

after June. You have a daughter to get married & the sooner she is married the better. I must go to London however in March. I have given that date to the B.B.C. people for rehearsals. My London will not be in the least upset—it will be writing & painting & hardly know that there is a coronation.

You say I seem far away—I am far away from everybody & everything. Something happened to me in the darkness some weeks ago. It began with those damned forgeries<sup>1</sup>—I have the old Fenian conscience—death & execution are in the day's work but not that. Everything seems exaggerated—I had not a symptom of illness yet I had to take to my bed. I kept repeating the sonnet of Shakespeare's about 'captain good'—I felt I was in an utter solitude. Perhaps I lost you then, for part of my sense of solitude was that I felt I would never know that supreme experience of life—that I think possible to the young—to share profound thought & then to touch. I have come out of that darkness a man you have never known—more man of genius, more gay, more miserable.

I write poem after poem, all intended for music, all very simple—as a modern Indian poet has said 'no longer the singer but the song'. I will send you that Cromwell when I can get it typed. It is very poignant because it was my own state watching romance & nobility disappear. I have recovered a power of moving the common man I had in my youth. The poems I can write now will go into the general memory. My poem does not echo Chesterton whom I have never read, but old Gaelic ballads friends translated to me. The man who wrote that silliness about Shelley is part of the multiple Cromwell—but I won't go on—I am upsetting myself. I want to go on writing to-day's poem about a certain rebel melody no England ever heard of—it has for burden 'come let us praise the proud'.

<sup>1</sup> Casement—alleged forged diaries.—D. W.

## *Letters*

Here are three poems that give the essence of my politics  
(the second contains an actual saying of Parnell's).

### I

Hurrah for revolution! Let the cannon shoot,  
The beggar upon horseback lashes the beggar upon foot.  
Hurrah for revolution! Cannon once again.  
The beggars have changed places but the lash goes on.

### II

Parnell came down the road, he said to the cheering man  
'Ireland shall win her freedom & you still break stone'.

### III

I love what was lost & dread [what] was won;  
I walk in a battle; I have fought it again,  
A lost king my king, lost soldiers my men:  
Into the sunrise, into the sunset feet run  
Yet always beat upon the same small stone.

I will write again in a few days when I feel less of an  
egotist for there are things I want to ask you if I could  
only think of them.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

Penns in the Rocks,  
Feb. 2/37.

My dear W. B.,

Have you recovered from the flu? I think I have had  
it in a suppressed form, it often does that with me: tem-  
perature 96 and a general cold and misery. So forgive my  
silence if you will. Can you imagine what happened on  
Feb. 1? My wireless refused to function. Begin to feel  
that as this nearly always happens on important occasions  
it must be an unpleasant medium, which I have long sus-  
pected. Result I heard nothing.

## *Letters*

So you come in March. At the moment I fear I may be in bed, as I have a general overhaul next week, and may be put to bed. But this would be in London, and I induce the doctors to let me go to bed in my tiny London flat with a nurse to look after me, so that we can see one another. I am writing fragments, and when I have a batch you shall see them.

Oh my dear I too am in some deadly solitude. Probably it is bad health, the time of the year, the misery of the world. As always at these times I read Shelley; and Shakespeare, the Sonnets, which you quote in your last letter. Mad in their beauty, mad in their pain.

Yr. loving friend,

D.

PS. The prospect of going about London with —— to bring Elizabeth out (who is anyhow already out) is enough to destroy me.

Riversdale,

Feb. 3 [1937].

My dear Dorothy,

Hope you did not listen in. Every human sound turned into the grunt, roar or bellow of a wild beast. I am a fool —no more broadcasts of verse from the Abbey. All well at the Abbey itself—3 curtains enthusiasm. Got them by telephone & it is confirmed by the morning's papers. I send one with the Casement poem. Last night an upset—must alter all my plans.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

Still got Flu; for several days yet shall be in quarantine. Anthology still a best-seller.

Penns in the Rocks,

Feb. 4/37.

Thank Heaven dear W. B. that my wireless did go wrong that evening, although I suspect it to be possible

## Letters

(as you are still in bed with flu) that you mismanaged your own. I will guarantee to produce a more appalling collection of sounds grunts shrieks roars bellows squirrels from my own instrument than can be heard even in the Zoo on a warm night.

I have the first lovely production of the Cuala Press sent by your sister. I am doing a little regular work. Since I have known you I have become impotent of language; hoping this will revive I shall send you a batch one of these days. My dear, get well.

Yr. loving friend,  
D.

Riversdale,  
Feb. 8 [1937].

My dear Dorothy,

I too was delighted with the Cuala *Broadsheet*. My brother has got to perfection the old fashioned highly ornamented Dublin hotel or tavern where such men would gather after a Parnell Commemoration. The pictures on the wall are right; & the old Dublin waiter holding the bottle on to the salver. My poem too is, as it should be, an old street ballad & it sings well. On Feb. 2 my wife went to Dublin shopping & was surprised at the deference everybody showed her in buses & shop. Then she found what it was—the Casement poem was in the morning paper. Next day I was publicly thanked by the vice-president of the Executive Council, by De Valera's political secretary, by our chief antiquarian & an old revolutionist, Count Plunket, who calls my poem 'a ballad the people much needed'. De Valera's newspaper gave me a long leader saying that for generations to come my poem will pour scorn on the forgers & their backers. The only English comment is in *The Evening Standard* which points out my bad rhymes & says that after so many years it is

## Letters

impossible to discuss the authenticity of the diaries. (The British Government has hidden them for years).

Politics as the game is played to-day are so much foul lying. Last night being at last no longer infectious I had — in. He is the gun man I have told you of. He is a good deal in England where he has a brother. He says that in England the educated classes are politics-mad, but that the mass of the people have free minds, whereas it is the opposite with us. Certainly I never meet anybody who seems to care which side wins in Spain or anywhere else. Yet we are not ignorant; — knows more about military conditions in Spain than anybody I have met. I suppose we have had too much politics in the past to care about them now. Even as to Irish politics there is complete indifference.

A dull letter—forgive. I have been working hard, having had my first good night—no drug, sound sleep, though in a chair.

The Anthology continues to be a best seller. I cannot find out that 'The Rackateers' have had the least effect.

I am most anxious to see your new poems—all that you need I think to perfect your style is to watch yourself to prevent any departure from the formula 'Music, the natural words in the natural order'. Through that formula we go back to the people. Music will keep out temporary ideas, for music is the nations clothing of what is ancient & deathless. I do not mean of course what musicians call the music of words—that is all corpse factory, humanity melted down & poured out of a bottle.

Yrs,

W. B. Yeats.

Penns in the Rocks,  
Feb. 19/37.

My dear W. B.,

Forgive me if I am sad, being English, concerning your

## Letters

excellent ballad of Parnell. . . . This ballad will be sung for ever in Ireland spreading yet more hatred for many centuries. Meanwhile I think of Europe. . . . Also the Casement ballad. That was the invention of some underling, War hysteria, . . . *after* he was convicted for high treason.

When do we meet?

D.

Riversdale,  
Feb. 18 [1937].

My dear Dorothy: I do not know whether I owe you a letter or not but I feel a desire to gossip—& you are the only person outside my own house with whom I am intimate enough to gossip. Life is suspended for the moment—my recovery from influenza was checked a few days ago & now I am sitting up in bed completely recovering again. This letter is my first activity. I have just been pleasantly reminded that my friends must not regard me as normal for the present. Yesterday I received (through a New York friend) an invitation from an American Millionaire I have never met to stay with him in Florida, my expenses paid out & back, as he had heard I was in need of change of scene & rest. Clearly an alarum bell is sounding above my head (Gogarty is probably pulling the string). I have cabled my refusal and my gratitude. Florida is a place where the chief entertainment is I understand fishing for fish so large that it must be like fly-fishing for cows. To-day comes a letter saying that (through Rothenstein's grace) I have been elected to the Athenaeum Club under rule 2 (which means no entrance fee); it is, I fear, too expensive for me but as election under that rule is looked on as a great honour I join for a year at any rate. That means I shall have some where to entertain you, for they have a woman's annexe in Carleton Gardens. I have always had a childish desire to walk up those steps &

## Letters

under that classical façade—it seems to belong to folk lore like ‘London Bridge’ & that is my subject. I told you that my Casement ballad came out in De Valera’s paper some three weeks ago—it has stirred up no end of a commotion. Shaw has written a long, rambling, vegetarian, sexless letter, disturbed by my causing ‘bad-blood’ between the nations; & strange to say Alfred Noyes has done what I asked him in the ballad—spoken ‘his bit in public’ in a noble letter—I have called it that in my reply—various ferocious Irish patriots have picked off some of the nobility but not all. Public opinion is excited & there is a demand for a production of the documents & their submission to some impartial tribunal. It would be a great relief to me if they were so submitted & proved genuine. If Casement were a homo-sexual what matter! But if the British Government can with impunity forge evidence to prove him so no unpopular man with a cause will ever be safe. Henceforth he will be denied his last refuge—Martyrdom. Hilda Matheson has asked me about Edith Sitwell’s name which is in the Broadside advertisement. Do you remember our going through her works looking in vain for a poem about a Queen of China’s daughter, which you remembered? You wanted something of hers. I found that poem in Faber & Fabers Anthology—she had left it out of her *Collected Poems*. It is very simple & very charming. I was writing to her—about something else, and asked for it, forgetting that I should have first consulted you. Please forgive me.

No my dear this is not a letter—it is gossip. It does not count & if I owe you a letter, I still owe it.

Yrs affectionately,

W. B. Yeats.

[On envelope]

I send two or three newspapers with letter of Noyes & my ballad, etc.

*Letters*

Penns in the Rocks,  
Feb. 21/37.

My dear W. B.,

At last I send the ballad, done as you wished with the regular rimes. It has proved almost intolerably hard. I can only hope you will like this version better than the first. If ever you should print it for the Cuala please use with it the tune I sent, found for me by Mrs. Gordon Woodhouse: 'The brisk young bachelor', which is printed in Cecil Sharp's 2nd volume of *English Folk Songs* (Selected Edition, Novello & Co.), No. 25, page 60, from Somerset.

Tell me something of your health and dates. I, alas, have been ordered abroad for about a fortnight on March 3 or 4, to gather strength for this damned 'bringing out' and its ceremonies. Am full of self pity, always a sign of weakness . . . and I hate that.

Yrs. with love,  
D.

PS. I think and hope the ballad has gained. I long for your answer.

Riversdale,  
Feb. 26 [1937].

My dear Dorothy,

You have got much of the ballad quite right but in your absorption in technical difficulties you have forgotten to say why the lady would not lie with the knight. This would not matter so much [if] you left out the last four stanzas. Those stanzas (the rose tree from the three graves, the after death disillusionment) have no meaning unless we picture ourselves the knight & the lady loving one another all the time with full belief in each other's love. Why did you make the poem so difficult to write by rhyming every line instead of alternate lines as in my ballad? This has made you call the lover first 'knight' & then 'squire', incompatible titles (in one place you call



## Letters

him Lord). I suggest you put the poem aside for a time & then read it when you have forgotten the associations that arose during the act of writing.

May I not see the other poetry you have been writing lately.

The Parnell Ballad is on a theme which is here looked upon as ancient history. It no more rouses anti-English feelings than a poem upon the battle of Trafalgar rouses anti-French feelings. There are reasons why Gladstone is not loved in Ireland but that is a long story. The Irish reader of the *Broadsides* would [not] consider the Parnell ballad political. It is a song about a personality far removed from politics of the day.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
Feb. 28 [1937].

My dear Dorothy,

I wonder if you have had the enclosed.<sup>1</sup>

I have just had a press-cutting which tells me that the *Anthology* in Glasgow & Edinburgh heads a list of best sellers in general literature. To be a best-seller three months after publication is I think rare. I hear the sale in America is very great.

Having looked up every poem unknown to me some critic has complained of my leaving out.<sup>2</sup> I have nothing to add. Even intelligent men have the most abominable taste. I regret having left out Margaret Sackville but the critics have not discovered her.

I am gradually becoming healthier & well—when I am ill I am a Christian & that is abominable.

Yrs,  
W. B. Yeats.

<sup>1</sup> A press cutting.—D. W.

<sup>2</sup> A word clearly left out.—D. W.

*Letters*

Penns in the Rocks,  
March 3/37.

My dear W. B.,

Am practising with a fountain pen, so do not blame my writing. I have again gone through that infernal ballad. You are right (strictly) about the change of titles, though the titles of those days, centuries ago, were vague and almost interchangeable. It is simply done now, you have only in line 1 to put *wight* (which meant a person) in place of knight, and in verse 3rd 'the squire and the lady proud'. The whole point of the poem, which seems apparent to others who have seen it, is that the lady was prudish and proud and appallingly dull and she suffered remorse in the grave. I had hoped very much to see it some time or other in the *Cuala*, but never mind. Just correct these two words. The last publication is in all ways a gem.

Last night I took my girl to her first dance, and am now off for three weeks to France to collect sun and health for the next misery. This summer will be madness in London. Even the snobs are bored already, and are going abroad to let the Dominions and foreigners in.

Thank you for the pamphlet inscribed by you.<sup>1</sup> I had of course bought many copies and sent them far and wide. This one is personal and precious. Don't think my half-finished poems are worth sending. I want to write something that pleases me before I send or show you anything, being in that way like painters who cannot bear their half-finished pictures to be seen.

Good news that you are better again. Write to me abroad, letters with the Irish stamp are being forwarded, no others.

Yr. loving friend,  
D.

<sup>1</sup> Reprint of the B.B.C. National Lecture on Modern Poetry.

## Letters

The Athenaeum,  
March 11th, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

I am struggling with a great pile of letters from mothers asking me to look at their daughters' verse and the like, the usual plague. There must be about thirty letters still, all collected during my attack of influenza. That is why I did not write sooner.

I do not mind the historical association of squire and knight so much as the needless change of name. That is I think always forbidden. I will go through the poem again when I get home. I greatly want it for Cuala if it seems to me rightly built—perhaps I am obsessed by my own version. I will get Higgins to read it and *sing* it.

— has quarrelled with me because I have written about Turner.<sup>1</sup> She says that my offense is the sentence about W. T. shooting 'upon forbidden ground' which has, she declares, revived an attack which had fallen into oblivion. She never wants to see me again, etc. Everybody reads Aldous Huxley and Lawrence and knows what parts attack her, and yet she bothers about this dialogue which a very few people will ever read. The real trouble is I think that I have praised Turner. My offending sentence was of course my condemnation of his dialogue, but 'those who in quarrels interpose' . . .

I shall be here until April 8th. I am tired and will write again.

I long for your half-finished poems, but I understand why you don't send them.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

<sup>1</sup> In the Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*.—D. W.

## *Letters*

The Athenaeum,  
March 24th, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

I wonder are you back. My plans will be unsettled until I have had a consultation with George Barnes and Turner. We all meet for a rehearsal on Thursday and after that I shall probably know if I am to start my second program<sup>1</sup> at once, and if I can get down to Penns in the Rocks as I long to do.

I am at peace with ——— again. I made up my mind that I had been scolded quite enough and I would scold her instead. I worked myself up into a fine rage. The offending passage was not written to please her. If I had known that she would be angry I would have written it all the same. It was essential to my view of Turner and it was she and people like her that made much Victorian criticism worthless, and so on and so on. That her objection to people knowing about Turner's attack was ridiculous as everybody had in their hands Lawrence's and Huxley's attacks. I thought she would not bear being thought a Victorian obscurantist. Result peace. She has even recommended me to go to the Indian ballet as if we had never quarrelled. I discovered that no man can beat a woman in argument but that he may in swearing.

M. reminds me that our Dublin musician ——— could not understand and did not know how to write out the musical notes Turner had got someone to take down from M. for a little song of yours. He wanted to alter them, I would not allow that and said he had better find some notes of his own. I was helpless knowing nothing of music and nobody to consult but Higgins who knows nothing but folk music. You will find the song and its music in *I think the next Broadside*; that with *The Three Bushes*, which should reach you in a few days.

<sup>1</sup> W. B. Y. arranged two broadcasts of poetry spoken and sung, to illustrate his theories on the subject of words and music.—D. W.

## *Letters*

I have written a great number of poems, almost all for music. I learned from Higgins and now he learns from me, for he says I have and he has not the right diction. I have been in a very excitable state, the result I suppose of illness, strangely miserable, and this has given my poems a new poignancy. To-day I am feeling marvellously well and will probably take to prose writing, for I seem to have written all my themes for the present.

I am writing in one of the rooms of the Athenaeum library—a famous library. The walls which go up to a great height, but broken by a balcony, all books, and the door invisible because covered with the backs of pretended books. . . .

Yours,

W. B. Yeats.

I think I told you that 15,000 copies of the Anthology were sold in three months.

The Athenaeum,

March 26th, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

My broadcast is on April 2nd, not April 3rd as I said, hour 9.20 to 9.40. B.B.C. asks me to get as many people as possible to listen in. The music is arranged by Turner. It is now practically certain that my second programme is put off till after the Coronation, though we have a first rehearsal next Tuesday, so may I come down to you on April 3rd. •

Do not forget that you said I might stay with you in June. I am counting on that. In fact that is why my second programme has been put off. I can do it then.

Yours,

W. B. Yeats.

*Letters*

The Athenaeum,  
29th March, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

I have several ballads, poignant things I believe, more poignant than anything I have written. They have now come to an end I think, and I must go back to the poems of civilisation.

Yours,  
W. B. Yeats.

[Yeats came to stay at Penns on April 3rd for a week, and returned again later for a few days before going back to Ireland.]

The Athenaeum,  
April 11th, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

I found great peace and contentment among your beautiful things and in your company and I thank you. I hope you will let me return.

This morning I began the general introduction to the eight volume edition de luxe.<sup>1</sup> They are published in America. This introduction may develop into an essay on the nature of poetry or into that in part.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
May 4th, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

Only yesterday did I finish the proof sheets of 'A Vision' and I had put off all letter-writing until that finish. I hear that you are still unwell. . . . In a sense I am glad, for

<sup>1</sup> The American Collected Edition of his works, not yet published. The English edition is being published posthumously by Macmillan.—D. W.

## Letters

illness, if not too great, will get you rest, and I doubt if anything else could.

'A Vision' off my hands, I am getting to other things and will write to you in a few days about the Broad-sides. I may want you to get music for certain poems.

Nothing is happening here of importance, except this: the roses you gave my wife are planted round our front door and are flourishing. The gardener after all repented of his rigour and shovelled mud into the lily pond, and the arum lilies are tall and white and there are small sprouts on the water lilies.

My next B.B.C. is fixed for July 3rd. I shall be in London at end of June for rehearsals and hope you will have me for a time.

Ottoline has not acknowledged my *Upanishads*. However I shall walk in on her some Thursday.

My daughter has suddenly grown up, spends considerable time on her face with admirable results.

I am reading Roger Fry's translation of Mallarmé. He gives the originals and a commentary by a French critic. I find it exciting, as it shows me the road I and others of my time went for certain furlongs. It is not the way I go now, but one of the legitimate roads. He escapes from history; you and I are in history, the history of the mind. Your 'Fire' has a date or dates, so has my 'Wild old wicked man'.

I begin to see things double—doubled in history, world history, personal history. At this moment all the specialists are about to run together in our new Alexandria, thought is about to be unified as its own free act, and the shadow in Germany and elsewhere is an attempted unity by force. In my own life I never felt so acutely the presence of a spiritual virtue and that is accompanied by intensified desire. Perhaps there is a theme for poetry in this 'double swan and shadow'. You must feel plunged

## *Letters*

as I do into the madness of vision, into a sense of the relation between separated things that you cannot explain, and that deeply disturbs emotion. Perhaps it makes every poet's life poignant, certainly every poet who has 'swallowed the formulas'.

Good by for a little.

I am your affectionate  
W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
May 12th, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

Please let me include 'The Morning After'<sup>1</sup> in the Broad-sides. It will make a magnificent song and represents you at your best. Special music will have to be written for it and I can get that done here unless you would care to find a musician yourself.

I gave your ballad to Higgins without comment and asked him to report on it. He says some of the opening stanzas are fine and in the tradition, but that the last three stanzas are not in the ballad tradition. I also feel (and have felt from the beginning) that those three stanzas are in some way out of key with the rest. May we include the ballad leaving out these last three stanzas? Without them it is beautiful and complete.

Now I want one more English poem. Now can I have a De La Mare? I asked Hilda Matheson to find out the numbers of lines in 'The Three Jolly Farmers'. I think it is too long for a Broad-side (there is good pattern music for it). If it proves too long or if you do not like it, would you pick a De La Mare and would you get music for it? Or would you prefer a poem by somebody else? But we must get poem and music within a month. Then all twelve numbers will be complete.

<sup>1</sup> Published as 'The Judas Tree' in 1937 Broad-sides.



## Letters

We have now to get the ballads sung. We are organising our next Academy dinner to accompany presentation of medals, etc. A lot of ballads will be sung. That will be on May 26th. I hope for my 'Lough Derg', my 'Curse of Cromwell' and 'Three Bushes'. Last night Higgins brought a most amusing, slightly licentious song which nobody could tell from an old country song, every word and turn of phrase from the common speech. They will sing it at the dinner. It also goes into the Broad-sides.

Have you read Gogarty's book? Here everybody is reading it. A publican down the quays told a customer, 'You can open it anywhere, like the *Imitation of Christ*'. It is not all wit, one can say of much of it, as somebody said I think of Raleigh, it is 'high, insolent and passionate'. None of its attacks on things I approve vex me and that is because they are passionate. His only attacks are on modern Ireland. He is passionate not self complacent and so we forgive him.

Yours ever,  
W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
May 14th, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

I have just sent a wire, 'Poem too long, can you choose us another De La Mare?' Choose what you like if you can get us music, or pick something from Davies.

No doubt I shall get your decision about your own ballad to-morrow or next day, and about 'The Morning After'.

I am most anxious for that, for without that I will have nothing that shows you at your very best, at least I think not. It takes time to be certain about new work.

I enclose a letter which I sent to all the newspapers. I hope it may ensure the re-erection of the statue. I am

*Letters*

I believe its sole admirer, but I have always delighted in it. I doubt if any other statue of one of the Georges had its merit. I am made the more angry because a wild duck has made its nest upon the pedestal for years. It was probably sitting on its eggs.

Yours,

W. B. Yeats.

(Enc.)

GEORGE II

To the Editor of the *Irish Times*.

Sir,

I would go into mourning but the suit I kept for funerals is worn out. Our tom fools have blown up the equestrian statue of George II in St. Stephen's Green, the only Dublin statue that has delighted me by beauty and elegance. Had they blown up any other statue in St. Stephen's Green I would have rejoiced.

Yours etc,

W. B. Yeats.

Rathfarnham,  
Co. Dublin,  
May 13th, 1937.

Riversdale,

May 19th, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

The music for 'The Judas Tree' is excellent. Higgins sang it to me last night. Then too De La Mare's 'Hunting Man' is good. Can you get his leave? We can only pay a guinea as our circulation is limited to 300. We will find an old English tune. I have been searching everywhere for Mrs. Woodhouse's tune for your 'Lady and Squire'. I have mislaid it and may not be able to find it. We can get it from the book and that will be quite satisfactory if the version in the book was arranged by

## *Letters*

Mrs. Gordon Woodhouse. If it was not, do you think she could send us another MS. copy? I can only say how sorry I am about my carelessness. I never meant that we were not going to use the 'Pride of Westmorland', but we may have to put it to an old English air. If we use the air sent by Bottomley we will have to print the words over the notes and spoil the page for the reader. We have now, if the Auden proves suitable, all the words and music we want, and I am satisfied with the result. Higgins has done some fine songs, and Frank O'Connor. At the Academy dinner this day week, Frank O'Connor and Higgins will sing these songs. Higgins will sing my 'Three Bushes', and I will read the supplementary poems. Then Higgins will sing my 'Curse of Cromwell'. Gogarty will be in the chair.

I think the best English work in the Broad­sides is yours —best as poetry and for music. Turner's 'Men fade like Rocks' is fine, and so is the new De La Mare, but your work, taken as a whole, is more powerful and solid, more earthy.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

The Athenaeum,  
June 11th, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

I have founded my life for the last month on the supposition that you owed me a letter, but if I owe you one, as is possible, I must rebuild.

I got here two days ago and have done nothing, apart from seeing Dulac and E. P., but revise an elaborate essay on my own work for a new American collected edition. I left the Broad­sides complete but the May number not yet printed owing to the indolence of the musician, who has not yet copied the Bottomley music

*Letters*

and wont answer letters. We have now begged him to give up the MSS. that we may find another copyist.

My daughter is I think in London—she was to arrive to-day. . . .

I do not expect to see you until your season's activities wind up.

. . . .  
Yours ever,  
W. B. Yeats.

The Athenaeum,  
Undated. June 1937.

My dear Dorothy,  
. . . .

Penns in the Rocks was as serene as ever. I thank you. It is a joy always to be in your house and company.

I am trying to get you that magnifying glass you liked, but have not yet succeeded.

Yours,  
W. B. Yeats.

I have already re-written this once, but to-day nothing amends my handwriting.

London,  
June 22nd, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

I never wrote to thank you because I have not found where the post office is. . . .

I have all the happy memories I always bring away from Penns in the Rocks, or I should have if I did not feel that you were worn out with the strain of your life.

I am writing prefaces for a new edition at my publisher's demand and longing to get back to verse.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

## *Letters*

[W. B. Yeats stayed at Penns in the Rocks in June and again in July, and we 'blocked in', as he says in his next letter, the 'manifesto' which was printed as the Preface to the bound volume of 1937 Broad-sides.

W. J. Turner, Hilda Matheson and others gathered here during these visits, arguing, discussing, listening to Yeats's talk, making tunes for poems, trying to find the elusive truth about words for music. In the following year Clinton Baddeley carried these discussions further in three broadcast talks, illustrated with songs, which greatly pleased Yeats. He (Clinton Baddeley) is carrying them still further in a forthcoming book.

D. W.]

London,

June 27th, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

I am not going back to Ireland until the middle of July. I thought I had to go on July 5th. Could you have me for one day or two? I want to block in that preface to the bound volume of Broad-sides which we are both to sign, or still better to get you to block it in. My head is empty on the subject and I hate all prose. But then you have no time now so I must block it in.

Do listen to me on July 3rd.<sup>1</sup> Hilda will tell you the hour, I forget. — has had violent scenes about his music, but you will find it interesting, and the speaker the best yet.

When I go back to Dublin in mid July it will be to arrange a programme of songs for Pat McCarton the man who has brought me so much money from my American admirers.

Yours ever,

W. B. Yeats.

<sup>1</sup> A B.B.C. broadcast of songs and poems.

*Letters*

Riversdale,  
July 26th, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

Three times I have opened the envelope to add a new version of the enclosed poem.<sup>1</sup> It is the kind of thing I would have written had I been made Laureate, which is perhaps why I was not made Laureate.

Higgins came in three nights ago, approved our manifesto, said my broadcast was a failure, and blamed — in the main, thought his music good but —; said no singer trained on the diatonic scale can sing poetry; said all respectable people in Ireland sang according to that scale, but that he and all disreputables sang in the ancient 'modes'.

Hilda tells me how you are. Do nothing, think nothing. Fix your eyes on the green trees. I tried to bless you but they are more expert.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

A MARRIAGE ODE

On thrones from China to Peru  
All sorts of kings have sat  
That men and women of all sorts  
Proclaimed both good and great;  
And what's the odds if such as these  
For reasons of the State  
Have kept their lovers waiting,  
Kept their lovers waiting.

Some talk of beggar-kings and kings  
Of rascals black and white  
That rule because a strong right arm  
Puts all men in a fright,

<sup>1</sup> 'A Marriage Ode.'

### *Letters*

And say that these have lived at ease  
Where none gainsaid their right;  
And kept their lovers waiting,  
Kept their lovers waiting.

The Muse is mute when public men  
Applaud a modern throne;  
Those cheers that can be bought and sold,  
That office fools have run,  
That waxen seal, that signature.  
For things like these what decent man  
Would keep his lover waiting,  
Keep his lover waiting.

Riversdale,  
August 13th, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

That is great news that you are better—Hilda writes that you are. My quarrel with —— and your illness so knocked me up that I have gone back to my old rigorous diet, fruit, milk, salad, and I doubt if I shall ever leave it again, I am so much better on it. I am well enough to face the public banquet and make the necessary senatorial speech. ‘Our movement is essential to the nation—only by songs, plays, stories can we hold our thirty millions together, keep them one people from New Zealand to California. I have always worked with this purpose in my mind.’ Yet my dear I am as anarchic as a sparrow. ‘For things like these what decent man would keep his lover waiting.’ ‘Kings and Parliaments’ said Blake, ‘seem to me something other than human life,’ or as Hugo said, ‘they are not worth one blade of grass that God gives for the nest of the linnet’.

Here is my last lyric, which says what I have just said.

## *Letters*

1

Though I have bid you turn  
From the cavern of the mind;  
(There is more to bite upon  
In the sunlight and wind).

2

I did not say attend  
To Moscow or to Rome,  
Turn from drudgery  
Call the Muses home;

3

Seek majestic powers  
That constitute the Wild,  
The Lion and the Harlot,  
The Virgin and the Child;

4

Find in middle air  
An Eagle on the wing;  
Recognize the fire  
That makes the Muses sing.

I have written much verse since I returned, including a long ballad about a certain Galway man, 'Colonel Martin',<sup>1</sup> which is among the best things, almost the strangest thing I have written. It is meant to be sung with a chorus of concertina and wistle.

Yours affectionately,

W. B. Yeats.

First stanza goes better thus (I hate writing for the eye):

<sup>1</sup> Published in *Broadsides*, 1937.—D. W.



## Letters

### I

Because there's more to bite on  
In sunlight or in wind,  
I have bid you turn  
From the cavern of the mind,

### 2

But do not say attend  
etc.

Riversdale,  
September 5th, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

I hear you have been working over old scraps of verse and I am eager to see the result. I have just finished a poem which for the moment I like exceedingly. It is on the Municipal Gallery and is the poem I promised in my speech.<sup>1</sup> It is very much what my speech foreshadowed—perhaps the best poem I have written for some years, unless the 'Curse of Cromwell' is. After I had left the Academy Banquet somebody called for the 'Curse of Cromwell' and when it was sung a good many voices joined in.

I have no very clear plans except to be back in Ireland during November and December (where I have to keep an eye on the Abbey) and then get to a warm climate with friends and dig myself in to some inexpensive spot until spring. Then I hope to get back to Dublin and face the great problem of my life, put off from year to year, and now to be put off no more; and that is to put the Cuala Press into such a shape that it can go on after my death, or incapacity through old age, without being a charge on my wife. Then I can fold my hands and be a wise old man and gay.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

<sup>1</sup> Published in *Last Poems* (Macmillan).—D. W.

*Letters*

The Athenaeum,  
September 27th, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

You very kindly said that you would introduce the Broad­sides to Lady Colefax for her shop, if you had some advertisement leaflets. I enclose three or four.

Yours ever,

W. B. Yeats.

I have no news except that I went to Richard II last night, as fine a performance possible considering that the rhythm of all the great passages is abolished. The modern actor can speak to another actor, but he is incapable of revery. On the advice of Bloomsbury he has packed his soul in a bag and left it with the bar-attendant. Did Shakespeare in Richard II discover poetic revery?

The Athenaeum,  
October 21st, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

I have just heard from Hilda. I am so sorry about this new upset. You want a long rest and quiet.

God bless you.

W. B. Yeats.

[This letter refers to the death of my Great Dane, Brutus. I do not think that Yeats cared for dogs. But in the poem called 'To D. W.' he has, to my lasting joy, mentioned this hound in majestic verse.

Brutus himself had a great majesty, both of form and conduct, and Yeats had observed it. When he seemed too tired to reach a garden seat, the three of us would walk abreast, Yeats's hand and part of his great weight supported on my right shoulder, while my left hand and shoulder was supported by the great dog. I was always afraid of a landslide, but the great hound pacing slowly beside me never let me down. The seat was reached, the

## Letters

end achieved, and the tremendous Dane would settle down and turn into a piece of black and white marble until, our conversation ended, he would help us back again to the house. D. W.]

Penns in the Rocks,  
Sunday, Oct./37.

Dearest friend forgive me if this only reaches you in Dublin. My pen is vile. This is to say that I am more sorry than I can say about this Sunday. I have, instead of your company, just been invaded by a horde of fools. I wished they were all dead, but hope I did not show it. This or next week I go first to my dentist to be ex-rayed, then to my doctor, then to a man who pulls one's head off, and puts it on again a little differently. I hope the relief will be as great as the agony. It was sweet of you to remember the old dog. I shall place a great stone urn on some height in the Rocks, 'Et tu Brute'. His magnificent form, his great nobility must be remembered. Meanwhile I listened with intense pleasure to your reading.<sup>1</sup> You might have been in the room, which gave much comfort. I have the last edition of the *Cuala*, and will write later about this. The tune has been changed; and *no* acknowledgment to Mrs. Woodhouse who adapted a fine old tune. Keep well, and see me soon.

Loving,  
D.

PS. The ballad has also gone back to its first form, which you disliked! Am doing a little slight work. I think the illustration vulgar and unsuitable. *There!*

Riversdale,  
Tuesday,  
2nd November 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

I am horrified by that Broadside. I have only just read

<sup>1</sup> His reading of his own poems at the B.B.C.—D. W.

## *Letters*

it (I got back last night). I will have a correction inserted, acknowledgements made to Mrs. Woodhouse, etc. in the next Broadside. It is only one of the things that have gone wrong. Higgins and I were away. My wife has had flu and was much worse than she would admit. I would have returned at once but for my broadcast. However nothing of the kind will happen again. I am about to reorganise Cuala. I shall have a stormy time . . . but am in the highest spirits at the prospect. I hope to make Higgins managing director. If he had been here there would have been no errors in your poem and a wrong artist would not have been chosen. I was never sent a proof. If only there were an Irish Hilda Matheson. All the able people in my circle are absorbed in the theatre.

Yours always,  
W. B. Y.

My wife has just come in to say that there is still time for an 'Errata' slip in the next Broadside. I am about to write it.

PS. Please send me correct version of both music and poem and I shall have both sent out with the last number of the series. The 'Errata' slip will say this is going to be done.

Riversdale,  
November 11th, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

You need not send me a new version of the poem. I went through it last night and found that the error was not leaving out the last three stanzas. You, like me, thought it better without them. Without them it is a true song, and has a charm, quaintness and gaiety. Would you give me leave to put 'maid' instead of 'wench' in the first line, and put 'maid' instead of 'maiden' in the second line, ('O maid go mimic' instead of 'O maiden mimic'). This gets rid of a needless variation of words, and keeps

## Letters

'maid' to its meaning of 'serving maid'. I am writing to Hilda about the music. I cannot make out what happened. Last night my wife and I worked each other up into a state of excitement over it. Victor Brown who did the charming second picture (that to Higgins' poem) was to do the picture but refused at the last moment on the ground that he had illustrated the tale already (he did my 'Three Bushes') and as my brother was doing two of the final numbers, my wife went to Kernoff, and Kernoff, who has a harsh side, did his worst. His picture is a brute.

At Christmas or a little later I go to Monte Carlo or near by, and my wife comes and stays for a few weeks. If you and Hilda hate your fellow travellers on that cruise (and you will) come and join me. I shall be busy writing a *Fors Clavigera* of sorts—my advice to the youthful mind on all manner of things and poems.<sup>1</sup> After going into accounts I find that I can make *Guala* prosperous if I write this periodical and publish it bi-annually. It will be an amusing thing to do—I shall curse my enemies and bless my friends. My enemies will hit back and that will give me the joy of answering them. I have finished my book of lyric poems, and a new poem which is the start of a new book. I will not send it you until I have done the poem that follows and explains. For five weeks I could not write a line, and then the poem came and a new mass of themes.

I hope that health and happiness are coming back to you.

Yours,

W. B. Yeats.

[At the beginning of November I had a serious accident and was in a clinic in London for over two months, unable to move hand or foot, or to sit up, for the greater part of the time, and therefore unable to write letters. Such was W. B. Y.'s rage over the Broad-sides, and his excitement

<sup>1</sup> This became 'On the Boiler'.—D. W.

## Letters

over his new poems that he did not appear to take in the fact that I was very ill.

D. W.]

Riversdale,  
Nov. 20/37.

My dear Dorothy,

I thank you for promising to sign those pages. They are being printed off to-day, and I approve your amendations in your own poem.

I am longing for sunlight and warmth and shall go to south of France in early January. The coming reorganization of *Cuala* excites me. In my bi-annual (my *Fors Clavigera*) I shall do what I thought never to do—sketch out the fundamental principles, as I see them, on which politics and literature should be based. I need a new stimulus now that my life is a daily struggle with fatigue. I thought my problem was to face death with gaiety, now I have learnt that it is to face life.

My poem 'The Pilgrim' was almost as badly misprinted as yours, in line 4 stanza 3 the first 'all' should come out and in line 1, stanza 4 'rugged' should be inserted before 'bird'. Both lines are unmetred as they stand. In line 1, stanza 5 'tavern' should be plain 'public house'. When my wife is ill and Higgins away I have no help here—hence the errors. My wife struggled on fearing that I might come home and catch her influenza.

With all thanks and affection,  
W. B. Yeats.

University College Hospital,  
Nov. 30/37.

My dear W. B.,

Behold my writing! I am much better and out of pain at last. Am to stay here another fortnight and then go back to my flat to continue massage, injections etc. there. There I hope and long to see you. We can have delightful

## *Letters*

evenings there. So you see I'm once more in good fettle. It appears I was only utterly exhausted.

I am signing the Preface as quickly as I can, doing a few at a time. As I had slight concussion I dreaded these signatures, but find it fairly easy now. Will the book be out by the New Year? Do write, and write anything that comes into your head now to me. Any new poems? What colour will the binding be? Why not emerald green, not grass? Into which Essay did you say you were quoting the 6 lines of mine about the Shell? One line I am not pleased with but have lost it for the moment.

Yr. affecte.

Dorothy.

Have done 40 signatures to-day 2.30 p.m.

Riversdale,

December 1st, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

We shall bring out the bound volume of Broad-sides before Christmas.<sup>1</sup> The covers are made already, so I cannot take your advice about emerald green. My wife is just off to Dublin to see the musician. (I am amused to notice the mistakes I have had to correct in those three sentences. I have had a bad night but do not feel tired. Evidently, however, my 'unconscious' is in a distracted state.) My sole work since I came back has been to write an introduction to a book translated from the sanscrit by Purohit Swami. I wrote an introduction while I was in England and included that little scrap of verse of yours. Then I got Swami's proofs and had to tear up my Introduction and start afresh, and I could not bring your poem<sup>2</sup> into the new Introduction, which took a completely different track.

Yours ever,

W. B. Yeats.

<sup>1</sup> They didn't.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Shell.'

*Letters*

Riversdale,  
December 17th, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

I send you a little book about your favourite poem as a substitute for the old-fashioned Christmas card. The Phoenix was it seems the Duchess of Bedford, and if you look up Donne's poem 'St. Lucy's Day', a poem of great passion, I think you will be convinced, as I am, that to console herself, perhaps for the faithlessness of the Turtle, she had an affair with Donne.

You will have the December Broadside by now, with the enclosed *errata*, a slip which is at last I hope correct. The small slip in the November number was written and printed before I had your corrections about the music. Confined to my bed half the day and unable to go out into the winter air, I do my editing under difficulties. My wife gives valiant aid, but her children and her house weigh her down, and there is so much to do between theatre and Cuala.

I am writing my *Fors Clavigera*;<sup>1</sup> for the first time in my life I am saying what are my political beliefs. You will not quarrel with them, but I shall lose friends if I am able to get on to paper the passion that is in my head. I shall go on to poetry and the arts, and shall be not less inimical to contemporary taste.

I shall be in London but two or three days, long enough to go and see you, and then I go to Monte Carlo. If I stay long in London I shall wear myself out.

Yours always,  
W. B. Yeats.

I shall write to Hilda and ask how you are.

<sup>1</sup> Published as 'On the Boiler'.—D. W.



*Letters*

Riversdale,  
December 21st, 1937.

My dear Dorothy,

I have just wired 'Date not fixed writing'. I could not wire yesterday because the telegraph boy went off without waiting for an answer and I did not like to send the gardener to the village in the wet and rain. . . .

My sister came on Sunday to see and approve a new design. A priest had called to see her and told her that when he confessed a convent of nuns he felt as if he had been eaten alive by ducks. Think of all those blunt bills.

Post goes in a few minutes. Here is a rhyme that has come into my head.

Unlike that soul of fire  
Sir John ———  
I but raise your finger tip  
To my lip:  
    and remain your affectionate  
                                W. B. Yeats.

18 York House,  
Turk's Row,  
Chelsea, S.W.3  
Just out of the Clinic,  
Dec. 26/37.

My dear W. B. Did I thank you for the Phoenix and Turtle? I am so glad to have it from you. Am impatiently awaiting you here. In dense fog yesterday I re-read all your letters. They bring back vividly your first visit to Penns (of course I started with your first note to me) in May 1935. I relived again my fear of your arrival, my joy that you should come, the relief of finding I was not to be afraid of you at all, that we understood one another. I cannot think of Ottoline without gratitude that she showed such intelligence of heart, came to me bringing you; not asking me to lunch in London to meet you as a

## Letters

less sensitive woman would have done. It is too long since we met. I have been really ill and though well now have little strength. To-day I spent putting papers in some order preparing if possible to work again. Both children go their ways now. In my room here in a service flat I am freed (for the first time in 23 years) of domestic burdens. Can be writer, not housekeeper. I wish you could stay longer in London but you must not. Illness and physical rest, or concentration on how best to conceal agonising pain from friends, has left me reborn. Grim patience keeps me going, I feel older yet younger. Did I die perhaps? Anyway I believe myself to be at the above address awaiting your arrival. Thank you for the splendid poem about Sir John and yourself. How lovely the Broad-side book is, I am giving away many for Xmas.

Yrs. with love,  
Dorothy.

Hotel Carlton,  
Menton,  
26th Jan. 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

Here I am in a very pleasant and cheap hotel, my window looking out on to a still and smooth sea. I was ill for a few days, and am now well and likely to remain so for this laborious meditative (life), uninterrupted, perfectly suits me. I have corrected the proofs of *New Poems*, my poems of the last few years, that for the moment please me better than anything I have done. I have got the town out of my verse. It is all nonchalant verse—or it seems to me—like the opening of your 'Horses'.

I shall in all likelihood be here a couple of months. I am finishing my belated pamphlet and will watch with amusement the emergence of the philosophy of my own poetry, the unconscious becoming conscious. It seems to increase the force of my poetry.

## *Letters*

Tell me of yourself. Do not try to write verse. You are young as poets count age and will be better for meditation and rest. Rest is a great instructor, for it brings the soul back to itself. We sink down into our own soil and take root again.

Yours,  
W. B. Yeats.

Penns in the Rocks,  
Jan. 30/38.

My dear W. B.

Having no news of you I telegraphed to Mrs. Yeats to ask your address, partly because I wanted to know where you were, and partly because I wanted to know how you were. With the tact I expected I had an answer to both questions though I hadn't asked how you were, fearing she might be alarmed at my inquiry. Her reply is 'news is very good'.

Two poems enclosed.<sup>1</sup> You may or may not like them. The poem on the doe (I have no name for it) came to me as it stands.

I had been out in the motor on what apparently was the first Spring day in the world. Illness compensates. These two poems came very easily, the Doe in an hour, as one used to write when very young. Are you writing poetry?

If you feel up to sending a note I shall be very glad to see that scholar-spider writing again.

Yr. affec.  
Dorothy.

PS. 'Chequer' is used as an alternative to 'markings'. 'Pattern' would also do, perhaps, but of course there should never be any alternative for any word.

<sup>1</sup> 'Poem' and 'The Shell'.

POEM

Nature, knowing bird and beast,  
Guards her greatest like her least;  
Makes her insects like twigs seem,  
A dragon-fly a dart of sky,  
Cat's eye a-gleam a leaf a-beam,  
Short bloody hours a pool of flowers,  
The moonlight clear a fallow deer  
When yonderly at eve he goes  
To join the herding of the does.

Thus when a gentleness shall fold  
Upon a jungle deep,  
Her love, her lordship as of old  
Shall melt the wild into her mould  
And guard the lion in sleep.

For this I know but may not see:  
How, safe to quit a pride of lions—  
Gold cubs that drowsy gleam  
Within the dark of streakéd ferns—  
A lioness at twilight turns  
To lap like milk the stream.

Yea, but this myself have seen:  
A dappled doe in brake,  
Sleeping warm around her fawn  
Above the lily lake.  
This have I watched at opening dawn,  
Have watched until she wake.

The when she will, O then she will  
Her dapples from her shake,  
Her coins of silver round her spill,

### *Letters*

Her golden discs drop down until  
Her dews of diamond flake;  
Till all the ferns her chequer feign,  
And all the Rough conspires to make  
A woodland lovelier for her sake,  
To rob the sunlight off the rain  
That falls beyond the hill.

Till, coming to the lily lake,  
She'll paddle to her belly,  
Swimming with fawn at break of dawn  
From lily unto lily;  
And turning long and rosy tongue  
Round lightest leaf and lily bud  
Will feed the white child of her blood  
On a morning water lily.

When I am brought to bed of pain,  
And know my labour's over,  
I think I'll lie in peace and dream  
Of that great cat who laps the stream,  
And not of love or lover.

When I give birth to death again,  
Or death to birth for ever,  
I'll rest, remembering opal rain  
That woke the doe in cover;  
And see again her coat inlaid  
With gold and silver glance the glade,  
And lights that ripple over;  
And see her swim with spirit eyes  
To lilies of her Paradise.

February 1938.

THE SHELL

*For W. B. Yeats, with the gift of a Shell, which was once a possession of Sir Thomas Wyatt.*

Hold the shell against the ears :  
Oldest of the twisted tiers  
Of life's stairs that climb and climb  
Up to light through sophist Time  
To the eternal airs.

Thus to me a change appears :  
I'll shed memory, shuffle years,  
Dodge that dull imposter Time,  
Doff the mask his sentry wears  
At each turning of the stairs  
On life's steps that climb and climb  
To the eternal sun ;

<sup>1</sup>Time is dead yet not begun.  
Thought, where is formality?  
Doctor Pangloss where is he?  
Or Space or Time or sophistry?

In a woodland bright she goes,  
On a path of Phoebus' way,  
Through the everlasting dews :  
Still she loves who loved a day.

Past and present yet to be ;  
Love is eye-bright, Hermes lame,  
Mathematics are a game :  
Ring on ring and quoit on quoit,  
Argument must be adroit.

<sup>1</sup> The four stanzas which follow were eventually omitted from the poem when published.—D. W.

*Letters*

Spirit now is Principle  
And the all-invincible;  
Music now shall break her laws,  
Poetry copulate with Cause.

Lyric spiral, lighted whorl,  
Flight of stars at mouth of pearl,  
Infinity within an ell,  
Rainbow steps and starry sense,  
All the iris influence  
In the spectrum of a shell.

Hold the shell against the ears!  
I will climb the circling stairs;  
Time, where are thy fixed spheres?  
I will leap and I will run  
To the eternal airs.

Dorothy Wellesley.

Carlton Hotel,  
6th Feb. 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

I like 'The Shell', it is charming and profound and full of good words—eyebright, Pangloss, formality, copulate.

I don't like the other so much, it runs on from one association to another, and you never pull at the bit. I don't understand the first stanza, what has the panther to do with the lions? It would be better without that stanza I think. It could begin: 'Here is something I have seen'. But you cannot use 'fawn' in the plural, you can say 'a heard of deer' but not 'a herd of stag' or a 'herd of fawn'. You can change the line to 'And here and there a sleeping fawn'. Then 'wake' should be 'woke', which is quite as good a rhyme as anybody deserves. Here is the whole stanza little altered:

## *Letters*

Here is something I have seen  
Above the lily lake,  
Here and there a sleeping fawn  
And a doe in the brake,  
This have I watched at opening dawn,  
Have watched until she woke.

One has to stress 'and' and then I think the movement is charming. I like the last word not giving the expected rhyme. If you make such change as I suggest I will take back what I said for I shall like it as much as the other poem.

Your last letter but one crossed letters of mine which I hope you have had. My delay in writing was all owing to that encounter of mine with red cabbage. I was ill more or less for two weeks, but now I am very well indeed, and have done much work, my political pamphlet (which will amuse you), the proof sheets of my new poems, and the revision of somebody else's work for the Cuala Press. In a few days I shall start writing poetry again.

My wife is here and we shall be here or hereabouts for a couple or almost a couple of months.

I am so glad that you are better and at home again. This is the only paper I have.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

PS. Did you mean me to keep the poems?

Penns in the Rocks,  
Feb. 26/38.

My dear W. B.

Thank you for your letter and criticisms on my poems. Let me say first how glad I am to hear good news of you. When will your new poems be out? I am pleased that you like the *Shell*. I still think it too obscure for most people owing to its concentration and 'jumpiness'. Perhaps one should descend to explanation, bearing in mind that what



## Letters

is clear to the writer is not clear to the reader. There is really no reason for obscurity, it proceeds almost always from sheer laziness. But there is an entire difference between 'difficult' poetry and 'meaningless' poetry. I enclose a new version of the other poem. The points you mention are now cleared up I hope. Of course 'fawn' is used in the singular; does have one child as a rule like mares. You can have 'woke' instead of 'wake' if you prefer it. This poem would not appeal much to you because nature means very little to you. Your experience does not seem to be visual but almost completely cerebral; whereas I get life first through the eyes, thought comes second, and Pantheism is perhaps my only philosophy. The only one that seems to influence my whole life, to have any reality for me. In this I feel near to Shelley and further from Wordsworth that great nature-poet who understood nothing of Pantheism whatsoever. I am reading Caedmon 'the great sail of whose proud verse' affected me first at the age of 12. I find his *Creation* written in 670 most moving. I had forgotten that it was not printed until 1655. One wonders if Dante read it in MS. and certainly Milton must have known it. What imaginative power, what nobility of utterance!

He first created  
For the children of earth  
Heaven as a roof  
The holy Creator.

And Hell; a place 'without light and full of flame'.

These very early writers had so much of that blessed economy which later writers find so hard to achieve. They wrote as Marcus Aurelius advised all good men to live: Heading straight for the goal casting not a glance behind.

Yr. friend,  
Dorothy.

*Letters*

Hotel Idéal Séjour,  
Cap Martin,  
15th March 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

Your telegram has just come. Thank you. I shall get to you some time on March 24th. We arrive at the Grosvenor Hotel, Victoria on October [*sic*] 23rd at 6 p.m. I shall stay at the Grosvenor not at the club and go on from there on Oct. [*sic*] 24th. I wish George would accept your invitation but she asks me to explain that she is hurrying back to Dublin to our son Michael who is home from school with a septic leg. When I arranged to go to the Grosvenor not the club I was still under the influence of my three months concentration on my work and was like those people in a religious meditation who if you lay a finger on an arm show a bruise where you touched them. I could not bear the thought of meeting anybody I knew outside Penns in the Rocks. I thought that if I could go to Penns I could escape this touch on my arm. Now that some days have passed since I gave up creative work I am less sensitive.

I thought your new version of that poem most admirable—rich and accurate, but I will not speak more of it until we meet.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

[Yeats came to Penns on March 24th for a week. He was full of creative energy, but tired easily.—D. W.]

Steyning,  
4th April 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

I did not write because every morning I have been at work on the poem and because it went on all day in my

### *Letters*

head. This morning I finished it, though I have not yet made a clean copy.

I was very happy to be at Penns and to find you so well. Reading you my poetry was a great help. I altered everything that you questioned I think.

Hilda wrote me just after I left to speak of some arrangement to get me some psychic information I wanted. As a result Harry Price comes to tea to-day. Yes I find that from 23rd April to 2nd May will be admirable and I thank you.

I am tired and must lie down before Harry Price comes. Writing poetry is exhausting.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

11th April 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

I enclose copy of that poem you liked in my first sketch. Since I came here I have been revising that and other poems and writing my play. That too will I hope be verse. To-morrow I go to the Athenaeum for two days. I shall be with you on the 23rd, the day your little bit of paper says I am to come.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

#### LONG-LEGGED FLY

That civilisation may not sink  
The great battle lost,  
Quiet the dog, tether the pony  
To a distant post.  
Our master Caesar is in the tent  
Where the maps are spread,  
His eyes fixed upon nothing,  
A hand under his head.

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Like a long-legged fly upon the stream  
His mind moves upon silence.

That the topless tower may be burned  
And men recall that face,  
Show much politeness, gentleness,  
Ceremony in this place.  
She thinks, half woman, half child,  
That nobody looks; her feet  
Dancing a tinker shuffle  
She picked up in the street.

Like a long-legged fly upon the stream  
Her mind moves upon silence.

That girls at puberty may find  
The first Adam in their thought,  
Shut the door of the Pope's chapel,  
Keep those children out.  
There on that scaffolding reclines  
Michael Angelo,  
With no more sound than the mice make  
His hand moves to and fro.

Like a long-legged fly upon the stream  
His mind moves upon silence.

Penns in the Rocks,  
April 15/38.

My dear W. B.

Thank you for your lovely poem. I find the first and last stanzas especially moving on a first second and third reading. Such beauty brings tears, especially these days. I have only just had the April number of the *London Mercury* with yet more beauties of yours. The first two up to

*Letters*

your very highest level: Wicked old Man and Acre of Grass.

Yr. affecte.

Dorothy.

[Yeats came again to Penns at the end of April. Several of the friends he liked to meet here came also, including W. J. Turner and Clinton Baddeley, and the talk was even better than usual.—D. W.]

The Athenaeum,  
Pall Mall, S.W.,  
May 6th, 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

I thank you for the most exciting week I have had in England for years. I came away full of ideas, old ideas made more vital, and some new.

I go back to Ireland this day week, well in body and in mind.

It is a curious (thing). In the last fortnight I have come to understand the reason why people think certain things, with the result that I have new poems that I long to write. I have grown abundant and determined in my old (age) as I never was in youth.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

Riversdale,  
May 24th, 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

There has been an article upon my work in the *Yale Review*, which is the only article on the subject which has not bored me for years. It commends me above other modern poets because my language is 'public'. That word which I had not thought of myself is a word I want.

## Letters

Your language in 'Fire' is 'public', so is that of every good ballad. (I may send you the article because the criticism is important to us all.) It goes on to say that, owing to my age and my relation to Ireland, I was unable to use this 'public' language on what it evidently considered the right public material, politics. The enclosed little poem is my reply. It is not a real incident, but a moment of meditation.

I am recovering from a wet dirty sky (always bad for my heart), a bad crossing and a too benevolent existence, but I write daily.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

P.S.

In part my poem is a comment on ——'s panic-stricken conversation.

No artesian well of the intellect can find the poetic theme.

## POLITICS

*'In our time the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms.'* (Thomas Mann.)

Beside that window stands a girl;  
I cannot fix my mind  
On their analysis of things  
That benumb mankind.  
Yet one has travelled and may know  
What he talks about;  
And one's a politician  
That has read and thought.  
Maybe what they say is true  
Of war and war's alarms;  
But O that I were young again  
And held her in my arms.

## Letters

Riversdale,  
June 10th, 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

Here is a better version of that scrap of verse.

Do you ever write scraps of verse on your blotter and forget them? My eye has lit on this which amuses me. I had forgotten it.

What shall I toast?  
No, not the Father,  
A simple man  
I had much rather  
The Son or the Ghost.

I have finished my long meditative poem on Greek statues, but that I will send you (you were its suggestion) when I get it typed.<sup>1</sup>

Yours,  
W. B. Yeats.

### THE THEME

*'In our time the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms.'*—*Thomas Mann.*

A girl is standing there; and I  
Would all attention fix  
On Roman or on Russian  
Or on Spanish politics;  
And here's a traveller that knows  
What he talks about,  
And there's a politician  
That has read and thought  
And what they say may be true  
Of war and war's alarms  
But O that I were young again  
And held her in my arms.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 183.

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Penns in the Rocks,  
June 14/38.

My dear W. B.

Thank you for 2 letters and the little poem. The second version is a great improvement and the scrap about drinking a toast to the Holy Trinity is charming. Have you more such fragments? Your new poems have come, and make in every way a beautiful little book.<sup>1</sup> The poem on Plato is at the moment my favourite, but to-morrow I may prefer another. I had not seen it, so imagine my delight. It might seem that after this you have no more to say, but you have no final word. I want the 'long meditative' poem which you tell me you are sending.

Yr. affecte.  
Dorothy.

Riversdale,  
June 22nd, 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

I had meant to go to England in July or early August, but am held here by reconstruction at the Abbey and at Cuala.

I am out of sorts and will be while this weather lasts. Yesterday I reminded myself that an Eastern sage had promised me a quiet death and hoped that it would come before I had to face *On the Boiler No. 2*. To-day I am full of life and not too disturbed by the enemies I must make. This is the proposition on which I write: 'There is now overwhelming evidence that man stands between two eternities, that of his family and that of his soul'. I apply those beliefs to literature and politics and show the change they must make. Lord Acton said once that he believed in a personal devil, but as there is nothing about it in the Cambridge Universal History which he planned he was a liar. My belief must go into what I write, even

<sup>1</sup> *New Poems*, published by the Cuala Press.—D. W.



## *Letters*

if I estrange friends; some when they see my meaning set out in plain print will hate me for poems which they have thought meant nothing. I will not forget to send you that poem about the Greek statues, but I have not yet had it re-typed.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

## THE STATUES

Pythagoras planned it. Why did the people stare?  
His numbers, though they moved or seemed to move  
In marble or in bronze, lacked character.  
But boys and girls, pale from the imagined love  
Of solitary beds, knew what they were,  
That passion could bring character enough,  
And pressed at midnight in some public place  
Live lips upon a plummet-measured face.

No! Greater than Pythagoras, for the men  
That with a mallet or a chisel modelled these  
Calculations that look but casual flesh, put down  
All Asiatic vague immensities,  
And not the banks of oars that swam upon  
The many-headed foam at Salamis.  
Europe put off that foam when Phidias  
Gave women dreams and dreams their looking glass.

One image crossed the many-headed, sat  
Under the tropic shade, grew round and slow,  
No Hamlet thin from eating flies, a fat  
Dreamer of the Middle Ages. Empty eye-balls knew  
That knowledge increases unreality, that  
Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show.  
When gong and conch declare the hour to bless,  
Grimalkin crawls to Buddha's emptiness.

## *Letters*

When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side  
What stalked through the Post Office? What intellect,  
What calculation, number, measurement, replied?  
We Irish, born into that ancient sect  
But thrown upon this filthy modern tide  
And by its formless, spawning fury wrecked,  
Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace  
The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.

W. B. Y.

June 1938.

My dear W. B..

I think I once wrote in a letter that all man's life was a rhythm: his waking, his sleeping, his loves, the passing of his loves, his despair, his peace, his acceptance of old age and death. The musicians have understood this. I do not think that the poets have understood in any way to the same degree. Perhaps they are too passionate.

### LOVE<sup>1</sup>

Likely are the ways of men.  
Love shall go to bed with lust.  
Love like queens if love you must:  
This the queen and harlot know.

Queen and whore unlikely meet  
In the throne-room or the street.  
But though one lies in sceptred bed,  
And though one walks in outer snow,  
Though one whored and t'other wed,  
Both shall turn and both shall sigh  
Toward the place where they have lain.

<sup>1</sup> First draft, enclosed with previous letter.—D. W.

### *Letters*

Love their poison and their meat,  
Both are queens for loss or gain,  
Neither ask the how or why,  
Both were queens between a sheet.

Women ever went with men,  
Great love ever lay with lust.  
Love like queens if love you must,  
This the queen and harlot know.

Bitter cry of infant then  
From queen's bed or harlot's bed,  
Crying when the cock shall crow,  
Crying when the chamber's red,  
Red as blood in light of dawn:  
'This is Heartbreak that is born!'

All are queens who labour so.

[I wrote this poem at 5 a.m. after coming back to my flat from a ball at Buckingham Palace, to which I had taken my daughter.—D. W.]

### POEM<sup>1</sup>

Do not think before you dance:  
Thought began with tune,  
What a chorus was the stars!  
What audience the moon!

Thought was gotten by a song  
Very long ago,  
Got on love, death, night or nought;  
Dance and sing and you will know  
Poetry mothered thought:  
Ode of Pindar, nigger croon,  
Wisdom's handmaid to a tune.

<sup>1</sup> Also enclosed in previous letter to W. B. Y.—D. W.

## Letters

Riversdale,  
3rd July 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

This first poem 'Love' is very moving and profound. There are words I would like to change. First there is the old point, never employ two words that mean the same thing. Why not begin the second stanza with 'Harlot and queen'. Then I don't think you can write 'between a sheet' when you mean 'between the sheets', but it is no end of a job to get it right.<sup>1</sup> How would this do? 'Both were queens upon a sheet' (but not change 'meat' to 'meats' or 'eat' to 'eats'). In the poem called 'Poem' I would prefer

What an audience were the stars  
What audience the moon.

This by making the stars active justifies the 'were' instead of the ugly sounding 'was'.

Then in the other poem called 'Poem'<sup>2</sup> I don't like 'found out poetry' because of the double meaning of 'found out' ('old found-out's daughter'). Why not 'or lit on poetry'. But I would like to talk over these poems with you. I like two or three greatly.

I have changed all my plans. I want to get away from this climate for a short time. You say you have only had one day of rain. We have hardly had one fine day. I met wet and cold at Holyhead and have been ill till a few days ago. For the last few days I have been well. I go to England on Friday or Saturday next. I shall have to return to Dublin on August 8th for some plays of mine, including the new play 'Purgatory' staged by my daughter and for much business. Then I shall have to stay in Dublin until the end of September. Then I go to London and will be there till November 15th when I go to France.

<sup>1</sup> I well knew he was right and I corrected it later.—D. W.

<sup>2</sup> Not printed.—D. W.

### *Letters*

My dear I am sorry but you see that upsets everything. Can you let me go to you some time during this first visit of mine?

The doctor examined me a few days ago when I had thrown off this recent attack and says my health is now what it was just before I went to France. I write badly. I happen to have had a bad night, not a fact of much significance for I am accustomed to them, and so think it better to stop though there is much I have to say. The trouble is that I am absorbed in business, in the chair at the Abbey Board yesterday—usual storms but all goes well otherwise. Cuala to-day going well also and to my great surprise peaceably.

Yours with affection,  
W. B. Yeats.

Penns in the Rocks,  
July 8/38.

My dear W. B. welcome back.

At such short notice I may not be able to collect your friends as last time. The Folly (my long dream)<sup>1</sup> is to be started next week so you will be here to christen it. Just off to Stratford for a few days, being tired by the business of daily life apart from Follies.

Yr. affecte. friend,  
Dorothy.

<sup>1</sup> This small classical temple, built at the top of the glade in front of the house, was a great delight to W. B. Y., and we were able to get him up to the site in a small car which could bump over the fields. John Sparrow composed a Latin inscription for it, dedicating it to the Muses and the gods of the countryside.—D. W.

## COMMENTS AND CONVERSATIONS

I add here a number of notes which I made during his visits to Penns in the Rocks in July, September, and October, 1938.

July 20th, 1938.

### *A Day at Penns.*

He seemed exhausted on arrival here at 5 o'clock. After tea (which he neither ate nor drank) he read me a new poem about which he had previously written, opening thus: 'You won't like this because it attacks King George V', 'But I don't care two hoots about George V,' I replied, angrily realizing that this was his first inevitable attack upon the English, which must continue for many days. I listened while he read his poem.

I discovered later that he considers that George V should have abdicated as a protest when his cousin the Czar was dethroned. 'My God!' he said, 'in ancient Ireland such conduct as that of George V would have been an impossibility,' adding that 'the English should have declared war upon their ally Russia in 1917'. About all this Yeats was intensely serious. I did not remark, 'A wise man you may be. Certainly you are a tribal king.'

When he had read the poem I said, 'What could be better?' I attempted, however, to point out that 'great bladdered' would prove a stumbling-block to any reader not versed in Irish folklore, and suggested 'great bellied' instead, saying that this would equally well give the same eugenic meaning without altogether losing the coarseness so necessary to the poem. 'No, I must have bladder!' he

### *Letters*

exclaimed. I think he is right. He went on to tell how in the Irish legend all other women were jealous of the Queen's power of retention due to the size of her bladder. This was of great importance as seeming a mark of vigour; also how the Queen was able to make a larger hole in the snow than the other women, so that they were jealous, and set upon her and killed her. I suggested he should write a short separate poem on this legend alone, saying that the snow gave the theme its poetry. 'She made a deeper golden hole in the snow' I said. 'Yes', he replied, with intensity. 'Perhaps to-morrow I shall write the poem.'

After tea I took him to the garden seat where we always sit. I am anxious. He cannot walk more than ten paces without pausing for breath, yet he will always spend that pause in talking instead of silence. To rest his heart he should talk less. He cannot be silent. Such activity of mind distresses me. He has very bad nights, when does he rest?

I do not suppose that Yeats ever knew a day of vigorous health, or physical vitality during all his long life. He once said to me: 'I have never had any physical energy'. Although he did not die of consumption, he joins the large company of men and women of genius who actually suffered from tuberculosis, or had some tendency towards it. The symptoms are unmistakable to anyone who has once had it. The feverish cerebral excitement, often the bodily excitement; the sudden rise of vitality, the sudden fall; the flame, the burnt up, the consumed.

Coming out at 1 o'clock precisely from his bedroom he shuffles slowly in brown slippers down the passage towards me. His hand is raised in a salute which seems a compromise between that of Mussolini and the Pope.

## *Letters*

His blue shirt immaculate, his blue-white hair beautifully disordered, he then delivers himself of his very last lines of verse composed in bed that morning.

### *Poetry.*

He does not really care for my poem which I call 'Poem' beginning: 'Nature knowing bird and beast'.<sup>1</sup> He says testily: 'You have written a flawless lyric'.

He does not care for it because it is largely concerned with visual observation, and therefore to him appears to have no philosophic interpretation. However, he does not know this.

This matter of Yeats's visual life is deeply interesting. To an English poet it appears at times incredible. George Moore noted this characteristic; indeed he was more than malicious about it, as the readers of his books concerning Yeats will well know.

I have come to the conclusion that this lack of 'visualness', this lack of interest in natural beauty for its own sake, may originate in the fact that most of the Celtic poets are not concerned with nature at all. Yeats did not himself draw much inspiration from Nature, certainly from no details; only sometimes massed effects, such as a painter sees, influenced his verse. Referring to a poem of mine Yeats once said to me in an outburst of irritability: 'Why can't you English poets keep flowers out of your poetry?'

I did not reply except to point out that my reference to a 'flower' was in that particular instance quite another thing. It translated or paraphrased the old expression in folklore, referring to female fertility. I quote this to show how strongly Yeats disliked flowers, and how his lack of observation concerning natural beauty was almost an

<sup>1</sup> See page 170.



## *Letters*

active obsession, and how it does in my opinion dim most poems of his concerned with Nature. Not so with his thought.

But there is more to say in this connexion about Yeats. I said that Celtic poetry has shown no close love or observation of Nature. But of Yeats I think it is possible that to this racial characteristic must be added his extremely poor sight. His small dark eyes turned outwards, appear like those of a lizard and as though at times they were hidden by a film. His perspective therefore is perhaps abnormal. Perhaps he cannot see very much out of doors. Certain it is that he sees nothing, when we sit together in my walled garden, in the beauty of any flower. The blossoming trees, however, interest him a little. But this is perhaps because blossoming trees play so large a part in Chinese poetry and Oriental philosophies. But he sees the beauty of the general effect and between his periods of fantastic prose will look up and say: 'You have made a very beautiful garden', forgetting that he constantly says: 'Why do you waste your time making your hands dirty just for the sake of a garden?'

Sex, Philosophy, and the Occult preoccupy him. He strangely intermingles the three. The old masters, the dead accepted poets about which I much desire his opinion, appear to weary him. He seems to have passed through these, and out beyond; this is much to my loss.

We all agree, however, that his sudden criticism of objects observed are both disconcerting and humiliating to us. He being a little deaf and not a little blind, we do not know where the great poet will pounce next time. But we do know that he will pounce on our weakest or stupidest spots, hence the slight awe and diffidence of us all when in his presence.

He does not now in his old age like people who contradict or confute him. I listen for hours in silence: to his

## *Letters*

flights of fancy, to his contradictions of logic and fact. Any exhibition of excitability or violent feeling he will always welcome. And yet for ever he craves for philosophic 'thought'. I put thought in inverted commas because the word is continually on his lips.

Yeats once said to John Sparrow: 'The tragedy of sexual intercourse is the perpetual virginity of the soul'.

I think he hated all his early poems, and 'Innisfree' most of all. But one evening I begged him to read it. A look of tortured irritation came into his face, and continued there until the reading was over. I realized then that this particular poem was, generally speaking, the first one asked for. His later poems he was always willing to read, also those of other contemporary poets.

Many of the evenings at Penns in the Rocks were spent in reading aloud, and in trying certain words for music, for this theme was the passion of his old age. One day, soon after luncheon, I begged him to go to his room and rest, or read a cowboy or detective novel which is much the same thing as rest. He answered with great gentleness: 'Yes, yes, I will'. Within ten minutes he was back again in the library. He had heard the sound of music and singing. 'You are all creating, and I must be here.' And the strangest thing concerning his excitement about 'words for music' is that he declared himself to be tone-deaf.

Once, when we were going over a poem of mine, W. B. Y. said to me: 'I don't understand this line'. I replied: 'I believe that syntax is one of my weaknesses'. To this he answered: 'There is nothing wrong with your syntax; it is perfectly all right.' I then said: 'I must con-

## *Letters*

fess that I have never understood the true meaning of syntax. I have always believed it to be the relation of one word with another.' 'Neither have I understood it', he replied. At the end of five minutes' discussion upon this subject he said: 'Go and fetch a dictionary! I think perhaps we *ought* to know what syntax is.'

One day Cornish the butler came to me (he seemed rather worried) and said: 'Mr. Yeats seems to be a-moaning to himself'. He evidently feared that he was ill. I replied: 'O that's all right, Cornish. He is writing, and is reading his own poems aloud to himself. Haven't you ever heard me doing the same?' I added: 'You see, we have to do that to hear how the writing sounds when it is read aloud'.

### *Sir George Goldie.*

Speaking of my Memoir of Sir George Goldie, the Founder of Nigeria, for whom Yeats (the anti-Imperialist) has an impassioned and romantic admiration, he says: 'Goldie and I could easily have exchanged roles'.

I cannot think of two men more completely opposed and more incapable of exchanging roles. Sir G. Goldie's characteristic was an excess of reason disturbed by passion. Yeats's characteristic is an excess of passion disturbed by reason. Yet both are poets, one English, the other Irish. Goldie's reason would have driven Yeats mad with scorn. Yeats's belief in the occult would have driven Goldie mad with fury. Perhaps I am wrong in thinking that these two great men are utterly opposed.

The reader shall decide.

No doubt Yeats like all true poets is a frustrated man of action.

*The Skins of Spirits.*

W. B. Y. says: 'To those who have seen spirits all skins of human beings appear coarse for long afterwards.' A famous medium told Yeats that for years after she first saw the beauty of the spirit-men she could scarcely bear to look at any living man. Yeats adds that to him also after he first saw 'spirits' all human skins appeared diseased in their coarseness. I set this down merely as a record of what Yeats said.

Those who are interested in this unusual theme might well consider those ancient beliefs which recede into pre-history. Those legends so deeply concerned with the beauty of spiritual beings. In modern times the detached observer may with value to himself recall two verses from 'La Belle Dame sans Merci':

I met a lady in the meads  
Full beautiful—a faery's child,  
Her hair was long, her foot was light,  
And her eyes were wild.

I saw pale kings and princes too,  
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;  
Who cried—'La Belle Dame sans Merci'  
Hath thee in thrall!

W. B. Y. also says: 'Individual immortality is now proved beyond a doubt. There is sufficient evidence to prove it over and over again in any Court of Law.'

I wish to make it clear that although intensely interested in the occult, and most especially in the beliefs of the great Oriental thinkers, I have never been a believer. These strange phantasmagorical forms of thought appear to me only attempts to arrive at the Truth which every man seeks.

I once got Yeats down to bed-rock on these subjects and we talked for hours. He had been talking rather wildly about the after life. Finally I asked him: 'What do you believe happens to us immediately after death?' He replied: 'After a person dies he does not realize that he is dead.' I: 'In what state is he?' W. B. Y.: 'In some half-conscious state.' I said: 'Like the period between waking and sleeping?' W. B. Y.: 'Yes.' I: 'How long does this state last?' W. B. Y.: 'Perhaps some twenty years.' 'And after that' I asked, 'what happens next?' He replied: 'Again a period which is Purgatory. The length of that phase depends upon the sins of the man when upon this earth.' And then again I asked: 'And after that?' I do not remember his actual words, but he spoke of the return of the soul to God. I said: 'Well, it seems to me that you are hurrying us back to the great arms of the Roman Catholic Church.' He was of course an Irish Protestant. I was bold to ask him, but his only retort was his splendid laugh.

### *Politics.*

At luncheon, especially when we are alone together, he makes a regular habit of upbraiding the English (or shall I say violently attacking the English). 'Your nation is nothing. It is only a stuffed lion, ha! ha!'

'In the eighteenth century you were all right, &c., &c., &c.'

Why then, in the twentieth century when the Irish are freed from their oppressors the English, does he despise and dislike us increasingly? Because he dislikes the stuffed lion and admires the roaring raging oppressor.

Of his political views I will not write more, these being largely embodied in 'On the Boiler'. His English friends had begun to notice some uneasy change in his views

## *Letters*

during the last weeks of his life. On the last evening at Cap Martin on which he seemed so strong and well, he exclaimed, throwing up his hand and snapping his fingers in some intensely personal gesture: 'I want to get at the truth of these ideas, that is why I want to live!'

I have said that I will not mention his political views. But it may be of interest to record that when alone with me he never spoke as to an audience, and at such times the fundamental simplicity of his nature emerged.

One day when the other guests had departed after some sort of orgy of conversation on a hundred themes, I resolved to ask him a number of definite questions: the treatment of Ireland by the English, the madness of Europe, the eternal problem of suffering, and the choice between Democracy which he hated, and Aristocracy which he loved. By aristocracy he meant the proud, the heroic mind. This included a furious attitude toward the cheap, the trashy, the ill-made. And he certainly deplored the passing of the stately homes, and the gradual effacement of the well or highly born. Finally I asked: (I had queried gently some illogicalities) 'What then is your solution for all these ills?' Dropping his hand which was never still, the brown hand with symbolic ring, upon his knee, in a gesture which to me revealed his moods of despair, he replied: 'O my dear, I have no solution, none'.

### *Women writers.*

Speaking to W. B. Y. of the difficulties confronting women who were creative artists, I said: 'No woman of genius should be expected to bear and bring up children'. He, raising his hand and speaking like the prophets of old, replied: 'No, we urgently need the children of women of genius!'

I pointed out to W. B. Y. that my poems, to quote the

## *Letters*

names of only three—'Fire', 'Matrix', and 'Asian Desert'—could not have been written by any human being who was not a mother as well as a poet, and a poet as well as a mother. Although (being a man), he had not thought of this before, he agreed.

### *Personal notes.*

A few details remain which may be of interest to posterity, much as any daily details would be about Coleridge, a man and poet whom in many ways I think he resembled.

His clothes perhaps belonged to the most elegant Bohemian sort that our generation has seen. He was always immaculately clean, always precisely shaved. One of the last things he said to me, when he could hardly speak, was: 'My dear, I'm afraid I'm not even shaved'. His suits were of soft corn or brown tweeds, with bright blue shirt or dark green, and always with handkerchief to match. The grand white-blue hair, which was raven blue in his youth, added much to his personality. So should great poets be dressed. I say great.

His personality was almost overwhelming. Had he never written a line in his life, I believe his personality would have been the same. He would have been one of the unrecorded men of genius, whom I believe to be numberless, and who are perhaps the greatest of all; those who in summer watch the swallows, and in winter the rooks, and who in conversation surely contradict their own philosophy by stimulating fame in others, that last infirmity of noble mind.

*Letters*

July 1938.  
(Copied at Penns.)

MAN AND ECHO

*The Man*

In the broken stone of the Alt  
Where sky's a narrow slit I halt  
And shout a secret to the stone:  
'All that I have said or done,  
Now that I am old and ill  
Seems to have done but harm, until  
I lie awake night after night.  
I never get the answer right.  
Did that play of mine send out  
Certain men the English shot?  
Or did my spoken words perplex  
That man, that woman now a wreck?  
I say that I have done some good  
As well as evil, but in this mood  
I see but evil until I  
Sleepless would lie down and die.

*Echo*

Lie down and die.

*The Man*

That were to shirk  
The spiritual intellect's great work  
And shirk it in vain. There's no release  
In a bodkin or disease,  
Nor can there be a work so great  
As that which cleans man's dirty slate.  
While man can still his body keep  
Wine or love drugs him to sleep;  
Waking he thanks the Lord that he  
Has body and its stupidity,



*Letters*

But body gone he sleeps no more,  
And he unless his mind is sure  
That its vision of life is true  
Pursues the thoughts that I pursue;  
Then he, being satisfied blots all  
Human existence from his sight  
And sinks at last into the night.

*Echo*

Into the night.

*The Man*

O rocky void  
Shall we in this great night rejoice?  
What do we know but that we face  
One another in this place?  
Up there some hawk or owl has struck  
Dropping out of sky or rock.  
A stricken rabbit is crying out  
And its cry distracts my thought.

Steynning,  
13th July 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

Before I left Dublin I gave 'On the Boiler' to Higgins, who is to send it to the printer. He has been away eight months and so was quite unprepared. His comment was, 'I expected an old man's oracular serene remarks—death holding the ledger. And I got this. That boiler is going to be very hot.'

I am writing a new 'Crazy Jane' poem—a wild affair.

Yours affectionately,

W. B. Yeats.

*Letters*

Steyning,  
26th July 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

I have borrowed the money and tipped him. I could not endure the thought of his meditating on my meanness all that long journey back. I would not have minded if it was half the distance.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

[Note sent back by chauffeur who had driven him over from Penns.]

Steyning,  
July 29th, 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

I have delayed to send you the enclosed poem. I got it all upon paper the day after I arrived but I have worked on details ever since. I have now begun on the stollen circus stilts.

I never saw Penns in the Rocks looking so beautiful—the green of July brings out the rose red of the bricks. I was very happy to be with you all. You know how to get together the best company.

Yesterday I went to Field Place. The proprietor a Colonel Challenger [*sic*, Charrington] and his guests were at the races but we had arranged beforehand to be shown over the house by the butler. A beautiful old house, one part Tudor, kept in perfect order and full of fine pictures (two Wilsons). We also went to the church where the Shelley tombs are, a great old church defiled by 1870 or thereabouts, stained glass, and pavements not at all as Shelley saw it. Before I leave I shall visit the pond (not that near the house) where Shelley sailed paper boats.

Yours gratefully,  
W. B. Yeats.

*Letters*

July 29, 1938.

JOHN KINSELLA'S LAMENTATION FOR  
MARY MOORE

I

A bloody and a sudden end,  
Gunshot or a noose,  
For Death who takes what man would keep,  
Leaves what man would loose.  
He might have had my sister  
My cousins by the score,  
But nothing satisfied the fool  
But my dear Mary Moore,  
Who knew what best can please a man  
At table or in bed.

Och! what shall I do for pretty girls  
Now my old bawd is dead.

II

Though stiff to strike a bargain  
Like an old Jew man,  
Her bargain struck, we laughed and talked  
And emptied many a can;  
And O but she had stories  
Though not for the priest's ear,  
To keep the soul of man alive,  
Bawfish age and care,  
And being old she put a skin  
On every thing she said.

Och! what shall I do for pretty girls  
Now my old bawd is dead.

## *Letters*

### III

The priests have got a book that says  
But for Adam's sin,  
Eden's garden would be there  
And I there within.  
No winter frost, no summer drought  
Upon its crop descends,  
No man grows old, no girl grows cold,  
Friends walk there by friends.  
Who quarrels over halfpennies  
That plucks the trees for bread?

Och! what shall I do for pretty girls,  
Now my old bawd is dead.

Riversdale,  
August 15th, 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

I enclose an account of the production of my play.<sup>1</sup> My speech is misreported. I said: 'I have put nothing into the play because it seemed picturesque; I have put there my own conviction about this world and the next'. A Boston Jesuit has tried to stir up trouble, but has I think failed. The mass of the people do not like the Jesuits. They are supposed to have given information to the Government in 1867. This story, which may be quite untrue, has made the Franciscans the chief religious influence in Dublin. The chief character in my play was magnificently played by a player who could probably go to the Barn.<sup>2</sup> The other character was played by a fine actor too old for the part. There was a fine performance of my 'Baile's Strand'. 'Cuchulain' seemed to me a heroic figure because he was creative joy separated from fear.

<sup>1</sup> 'Purgatory,' at the Abbey Theatre.

<sup>2</sup> Miss Edith Craig's theatre for which W. B. Y. and I were planning a programme.—D. W.

### *Letters*

I have found a book of essays about Rilke, waiting me,  
one on Rilkey's ideas about death annoyed me. I wrote  
on the margin :

Draw rein ; draw breath.  
Cast a cold eye  
On life, on death.  
Horseman pass by.<sup>1</sup>

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

### HIS CONVICTIONS

#### I

Swear by what the Sages spoke  
Round the Mareotid Lake  
That the Witch of Atlas knew  
When they that set the cocks a-crow

Swear by those horsemen, by those women  
Complexion and form prove superhuman,  
That pale, long visaged company  
That airs an immortality  
Completeness of their passions won ;  
Now they ride the wintry dawn  
Where Ben Bulbin sets the scene.

Here's the gist of what they mean.

## *Letters*

### II

Many times man lives and dies  
Between his two eternities,  
That of race and that of soul,  
And ancient Ireland knew it all.  
Whether man die in his bed  
Or the rifle knocks him dead,  
A brief parting from those dear  
Is the worst man has to fear.

Though grave-diggers' toil is long,  
Sharp their spades, their muscle strong,  
They but thrust their buried men  
Back in the human mind again.

### III

You that Mitchel's prayer have heard  
'Send war in our time, O Lord!'  
Know that when all words are said  
And a man is fighting mad,  
Something drops from eyes long blind  
He completes his partial mind,  
For an instant stands at ease,  
Laughs aloud, his heart at peace;  
Even the wisest man grows tense  
With some sort of violence  
Before he can accomplish fate  
Know his work or choose his mate.

### IV

Poet and sculptor do the work  
Nor let the modish painter shirk  
What his great forefathers did,  
Bring the soul of man to God,  
Make him fill the cradles right.

### *Letters*

Measurement began our might :  
Forms a stark Egyptian thought,  
Forms that gentler Phidias wrought.

Michelangelo left a proof  
On the Sistine Chapel roof,  
Where but half-awakened Adam  
Can disturb globe-trotting Madam  
Till her bowels are in heat,  
That a purpose had been set  
Before the secret-working mind  
Profane perfection of mankind.

Quattro-Cento put in paint,  
On backgrounds for a God or Saint,  
Gardens where a soul's at ease ;  
The soul's perfection is from peace ;  
Where everything that meets the eye  
Flowers and grass and cloudless sky  
Resemble forms that are, or seem,  
When sleepers wake and yet still dream,  
And when it's vanished still declare  
That Heavens had opened.

Gyres run on ;

When that greater dream had gone  
Calvert, Palmer, Wilson, Claude,  
Made a rest for the people of God  
Palmer's phrase, but after that  
Confusion fell upon our thought.

v

Irish poets learn your trade,  
Sing whatever is well made,  
Scorn the sort now growing up  
All out of shape from toe to top,

*Letters*

Their unremembering hearts and heads  
Base-born products of base beds.  
Sing the peasantry, and then  
Hard-riding country gentlemen,  
The holiness of monks, and after  
Porter-drinkers' randy laughter;  
Sing the lords and ladies gay  
That were beaten into the clay  
Through seven heroic centuries;  
Cast your mind on other days  
That we in coming days may be  
Still the indomitable Irishry.

VI

Under bare Ben Bulben's head  
In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid,  
An ancestor was rector there  
Long years ago; a church stands near,  
By the road an ancient Cross.  
No marble brags of public loss,  
On limestone quarried near the spot  
By his command these words are cut:

Cast a cold eye  
On life, on death.  
Horseman, pass by!

Penns in the Rocks,  
Oct. 5/38.

My dear W. B.

No I did not imagine for a moment that my telegram would prevent you coming to London if war came. But I did know that you would snort at my good advice. I only felt it right to let you know how near we were to war, and that although you would doubtless have enjoyed



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the fireworks as much as any of us, the sheer discomfort, dislocation of traffic, etc. would have been bad for your health. I could not have had you here at Penns, or Rocks Farm, as every single house and cottage on the estate, including outhouses were waiting to receive refugee children from the schools. You would have been quite unable to get through London. Everyone is tired out. I think we had better talk poetry not politics when you come. Too tired to write more. Valerian was to have been called up at any moment.

Yr. affecte.

Dorothy.

PS. I should have given Ireland all she wanted a thousand years ago. It is not the Sudetenland that Hitler wants. Wait and see.

Riversdale,

October 8th, 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

I have been arranging my Cuala business and at last have made it almost certain that I could reach you by October 15th at latest, and now am confined to my room with lumbago. I have no choice but to ask if I may postpone my visit. Forgive me.

Yesterday morning I had tragic news. Olivia Shakespeare has died suddenly. For more than forty years she has been the centre of my life in London and during all that time we have never had a quarrel, sadness sometimes but never a difference. When I first met her she was in her late twenties but in looks a lovely young girl. When she died she was a lovely old woman. You would have approved her. She came of a long line of soldiers and during the last war thought it her duty to stay in London through all the air raids. She was not more lovely than distinguished—no matter what happened she

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never lost her solitude. She was Lionel Johnson's cousin and felt and thought as he did. For the moment I cannot bare the thought of London. I will find her memory everywhere.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

Steynning,  
October 9th, 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

I am glad you are taking Hilda away for a change. I could come to you for the week end on your return; but I can come later on. I do not go back to Ireland till after my broadcast (Oct. 29).

Why not 'dreary time' instead of 'deadly'. The lines have great value in my essay.

Yours,  
W. B. Yeats.

Penns in the Rocks,  
Oct. 13/38.

My dear W. B.

Yes, the future also fills me with dread. The creative people must get on with their jobs, there is nothing else to do. My Temple of the Muses is finished and is a lovely addition to Penns. It crowns the top of the glade with simplicity and dignity. This place, these days especially, seems to hold within itself some proud and timeless beauty.

Yr. affecte.  
Dorothy.

Steynning,  
October 30th, 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

. . . I am well and writing verse. . . Just before I left we decided to start a new set of *Broadsides* starting on

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January 1st. Will you be English editor as usual? We want three numbers complete before we start. We would like a poem of yours in the first three. However if I may come soon we can talk over all these things. I may ask Higgins to send you some suggestions about English work. He is a good musician.

The last Sligo Pollexfen died a couple of weeks ago—the man I told you of who did so well at Zeebrugge.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

Steynning,  
November 18th, 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

I thank you for those cheerful days and because I learned something as I always do in your house.

Yours affectionately,  
W. B. Yeats.

Hotel Idéal Séjour,  
Cap Martin (A.M.),  
Dec. 1st, 1938.

My dear Dorothy,

I am back at my old Cap Martin hotel. The other was impossible, motor horns, trains, children, wireless. An affable landlady in return for an audience forgave us for leaving in an hour. . . .

This hotel is perfect as ever. We are the only guests; all the other hotels are empty too; the strike scared people away. The climate is perfect and it is so warm that on a couple of nights I have slept with nothing over me but a sheet and the window wide open. I am in the garden for a large part of each day. Lots of villas to let, including

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one with the most lovely garden in the world ; it was once the garden of the Empress Eugenie ; so if you tire of your present villa you can come here.

I do nothing but write verse.

Yours,

W. B. Yeats.

## LAST DAYS

December 1938 to January 1939.

I had taken a villa in the hills above Beaulieu and W.B., with Mrs. Yeats, was staying at a quiet country hotel on Cap Martin. The first evening I went to see him I was astounded at what seemed a miraculous return to health. He looked healthier, and his brain was more active than ever, if such a thing could be possible. He was half sitting up on his bed, much excited. Almost his first words were: 'I want to read you my new play'. And this he did. In spite of the confusion of a much corrected manuscript, he read with great fire. It was 'The Death of Cuchulain'. I was much moved, half aware that it was in some sense a premonition of his own death, though I did not know it was to come so soon. After his death Mrs. Yeats gave me the original MS. with a typed version.

Some days later he dined with us to meet Schnabel, the great pianist, and W. J. Turner who was staying at my villa and who was a friend of both Yeats and Schnabel. Madame Schnabel was there who knows small English and less Irish. Schnabel could not himself understand much of what Yeats said (which was a great deal) owing to his Irish brogue. They talked about Stefan Georg and Rilke, but the approach of the musician and the poet was so diametrically opposed, that points of contact were few and far between. I sat with the Austrian Jew on my right and the Irish Nationalist poet on my left.

On Christmas Day W. B. Y., Mrs. Yeats, and their son Michael aged seventeen dined with us. W. B. seemed very

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gay. He was full of charming stories: the little monkey god who threw down mangoes from the tree, the holy man embedded in the block of ice. He told me afterwards with great pride, knowing that it had been a good performance, that the stories had been especially for Michael.

On one of our visits to him at Cap Martin he read the prose theme of a poem he proposed to write in *terza rima*:

A shade recently arrived went through a valley in the Country of the Dead; he had six mortal wounds, but had been a tall, strong, handsome man. Other shades looked at him from among the trees. Sometimes they went near to him and then went away quickly. At last he sat down, he seemed very tired. Gradually the shades gathered round him, and one of them who seemed to have some authority among the others laid a parcel of linen at his feet. One of the others said: 'I am not so afraid of him now that he is sitting still. It was the way his arms rattled.' Then another shade said: 'You would be much more comfortable if you would make a shroud and wear it instead of the arms. We have brought you some linen. If you make it yourself you will be much happier, but of course we will thread the needles. We do everything together, so everyone of us will thread a needle, so when we have laid them at your feet you will take whichever you like best.' The man with the six wounds saw that nobody had ever threaded needles so swiftly and so smoothly. He took the threaded needles and began to sew, and one of the shades said: 'We will sing to you while you sew; but you will like to know who we are. We are the people who run away from the battles. Some of us have been put to death as cowards, but others have hidden, and some even died without people knowing they were cowards.' Then they began to sing, and they did not sing like men and

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women, but like linnets that had been stood on a perch and taught by a good singing master.”<sup>1</sup>

We had many delightful evenings together with him, Mrs. Yeats, W. J. Turner, Mrs. Turner, Hilda Matheson, and myself. On the last evening when we all went to see him, we found him as lively and excited as ever. After luncheon at that strangely charming and pagan place, La Turbie, we had motored into the hills behind Mentone, and then deep into the gorges beyond the town. Snow on the peaks, brilliant sun, bitter cold. A great exhilaration seemed to be upon us. At about 4.30 we came down from the hills to Yeats's hotel. As I have said he seemed to us as well as we had ever seen him, full of ideas about his theories of words for songs. I showed him a little song I had made for him, 'Golden Helen', to be printed in the *Cuala Broad-sides*. 'Yes, yes,' he said, 'it has great poetical profundity.' He was wearing his light brown suit, blue shirt, and handkerchief. Under the lamp his hair seemed a pale sapphire blue. I thought while he talked, 'What a beautiful man!' He read aloud his last poem, 'The Black Tower',<sup>2</sup> and asked Hilda Matheson to make a tune for it. She and I went out of the hotel, walking up and down in the rain and darkness trying the tune. When we came back she sang the air. He seemed pleased. His last projective thought seems to me to have been this wish for 'words for melody'. Melody, not music conventionally spoken of: folk, ballad, &c. I from early childhood have craved for this union, words for an air, and this is what we must now carry on.

On this evening also he said: 'The Greek Drama alone achieved perfection; it has never been done since; it may be thousands of years before we achieve that perfection

<sup>1</sup> The poem, which he read aloud some days later, is called 'Cuchulain Comforted', and is to be found in *Last Poems*.—D. W.

<sup>2</sup> See *Last Poems*.—D. W.

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again. Shakespeare is only a mass of magnificent fragments.' I moved over to the empty chair beside him and said I agreed. He then said to me: 'I feel I am only beginning to understand how to write'. I did not reply. For I believe that when a man says this (whether he be poet or painter) that man is approaching the end of his creative life; and this is because I believe that complete achievement, complete mastery, is the end of creation. The struggle is over. And that is also why I find Shakespeare more interesting than the Greeks.

Nevertheless one of the most interesting things about Yeats was that he continued to improve in technique and extend his power of vision until the day of his death. A friend suggested to me just after he had died that he had perhaps written his best, so that from this point of view his death should not rank as one of the great tragedies of literature. Since then this friend has confessed that it was only said to comfort me. Personally I believe that Yeats will live not only as one of the finest lyrical writers of the English tongue, but, on account of his later work, with the greatest of all the dead poets. Not however with the great dramatists of the world. A famous modern Greek actress said the other day: 'There are five great dramatists in history—Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides, Aristophanes, Shakespeare.'

On Tuesday he did not come to spend the evening with us as arranged, as he was tired. On Wednesday the Turners left for England and we were busy with arrangements. On Thursday morning I went to see him. He was very ill, in fact I saw he was dying, and I saw he knew it. I stayed only five minutes, fearing to tire him. In the afternoon we went again. Mrs. Yeats had said: 'Come back and light the flame'. I sat on the floor by his bed holding his hand; he struggled to speak: 'Are



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you writ . . . are you writing?' 'Yes, yes.' 'Good, good.' He kissed my hand, I his. Soon after he wandered a little in his speech, murmuring poetry. Later that same evening he was able to give Mrs. Yeats corrections for 'The Death of Cuchulain' and for the poem 'His Convictions' which he changed to 'Under Ben Bulbin'. On Friday he was worse, and soon passed into what proved to be his last coma. He had much pain from the heart, but morphia helped him. Next day, January 28th, he was dead. So ended in the material sense this short and beautiful friendship.

Mrs. Yeats came to stay with me at the villa. On Monday the 30th we drove to the little town of Roquebrune. When we got there we took the long narrow and stony ascent to the cemetery which stands above the town. The grave was scarcely prepared when we arrived, and workmen were hammering and singing in another part of the cemetery. Standing in the bitter wind of the mountain range, the words of the Protestant Burial Service were scattered far and wide by the blast: 'I heard a voice from Heaven saying unto me, Write!' The rest seemed blown away.

Enclosed by white walls, with many drowned sailors around him (as he would have wished), some obscure follower of Garibaldi beside him, despite the wide difference between this place and his native land, the scene was not altogether inappropriate, nor devoid of dignity. I think Yeats alive or dead brought dignity and distinction wherever he came. Fearing emotion, and hoping he would wish it, I made these four lines for him, standing by his grave:

In this little town of men  
Who withstood the Saracen,  
With Byron, Shelley, and with Keats  
Let us now give praise for Yeats.

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He died in a little bedroom up above and far away from the tide of stupid and ignorant people who love and have ruined the lower level of that beautiful coast. Byron, the tiger, dying alone among the swamps of Missolonghi; Keats in his tiny room pleading for the air, food, and water in those days denied to the consumptive; Shelley tossing in the 'frail bark of his lone being' on the storm he loved; Yeats murmuring poetry to the last gasp: so die, so perhaps should die, the truly great.

